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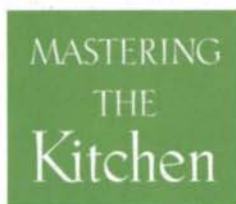
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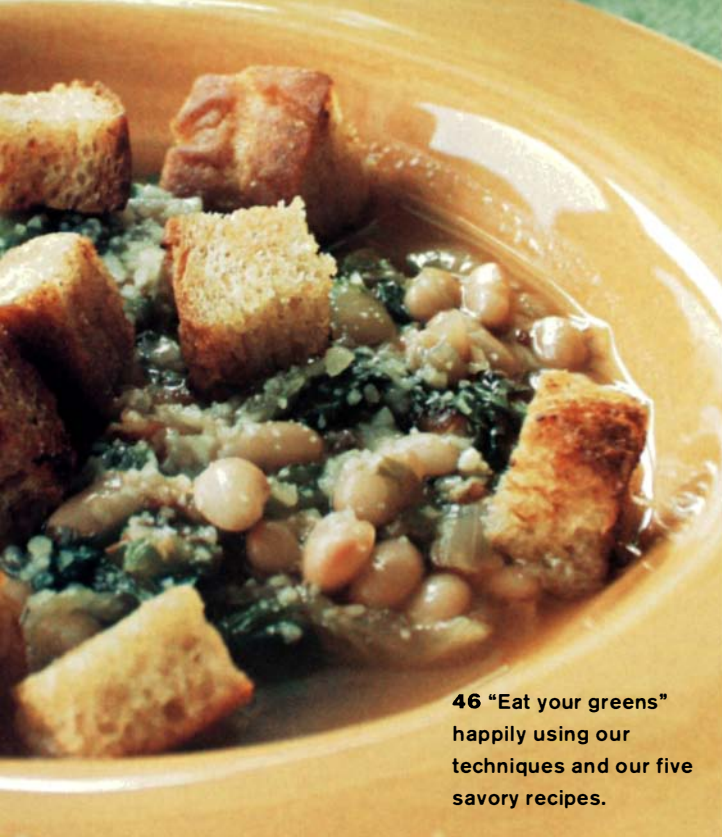
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Enjoy authentic doughnut flavor in an easy to make muffin; best of all, there's no frying

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Give salt cod a longsoak and then use it as a base for classic Mediterranean dishes like fritters and Provençal *brandade*

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Rich, full-bodied chili in 30 minutes? Artichokes in 10? You can do it with a pressure cooker

68 Christmas Cookies That Look As Good As They Taste

by Melissa Murphy Hagenbart

How to roll, cut, pipe, layer, drizzle, and dust for the prettiest cookies

On the cover: *Chocolate Drizzled Florentines*, from "Christmas Cookies," p. 68.

Cover photo, Scott Phillips.

These pages: above, Steve Hunter; all others, Scott Phillips.



24 Learn a simple glazing technique that intensifies the flavors of winter vegetables.

visit our web site: www.finecooking.com



Melissa Murphy Hagenbart

("Christmas Cookies," p. 68) is the chef-owner of Sweet Melissa Pâtisserie in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn, New York. Since its opening a few years ago, the pastry shop/café has received much praise from the critics, the media, the locals, and Manhattanites who cross the river just to enjoy Melissa's fabulous food, including—and maybe especially—her cookies. Melissa trained at Manhattan's French Culinary Institute and has worked at many New York restaurants. She and her husband are opening a pub around the corner from the pâtisserie, this one jokingly named for her husband: Angry Wade's.

Ris Lacoste ("Make-Ahead Beef Wellingtons," p. 38) has been passionate about cooking since she took her first job as a grill cook in a Friendly's restaurant when she was 16 years old. But it wasn't until she was studying pre-

med in college (and cooking at the Faculty Club) that she realized her

career would be in cooking. After studying in Paris, she went on to cook at 21 Federal restaurant for thirteen years, first on Nantucket, and then in Washington, D.C. Since taking the helm at 1789, Ris has won numerous awards. Most recently, the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington voted 1789 "Restaurant of the Year."



Lisa Hanauer

("Hors d'Oeuvres," p. 43) is a former chef-restaurateur who is now a food writer and a preschool teacher. Before owning Café Chêneville in Oakland, California, in the mid '90s, Lisa worked at Oliveto and Square One; she has also catered and taught cooking classes. She lives in Oakland.

Fine Cooking managing editor **Susie Middleton** ("Winter Greens," p. 46) started her professional life as a magazine editor, first at *Seventeen* magazine and later at *Sailing World*. But her true passion—cooking—lured her away from the publishing world and off to culinary school at Peter Kump's in New York in 1992. After five years of cooking professionally, she landed back in the magazine world in 1997, but this time, no fashion, no boats, just food.

Molly Stevens ("Roasted Potatoes," p. 51, and "Sauté Pan Pastas," p. 56), a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, travels the country to teach cooking classes for the magazine and to diligently research her topics—by eating in a lot of great restaurants. She earned a Grand Diplôme from La Varenne cooking school in France, staying on in France to work as a chef and caterer. Molly is the author of *New England*, part of the Williams-Sonoma New American Cooking series (Time-Life). Her upcoming book,



One Potato, Two Potato, co-written with Roy Finamore, is due out from Houghton Mifflin in the fall of 2001. She will soon start work as the series editor of *Fine Cooking*'s upcoming line of cookbooks, scheduled for publication in the fall of 2002. Molly lives in Vermont.

Kathleen

Stewart

("Doughnut Muffins," p. 54), runs the Downtown Bakery & Creamery in Healdsburg, California, where many residents and smart wine country tourists start their day with coffee and a sticky bun or one of Kathleen's great muffins. Before heading up to Healdsburg in 1987, she worked at Chez Panisse in Berkeley for twelve years.

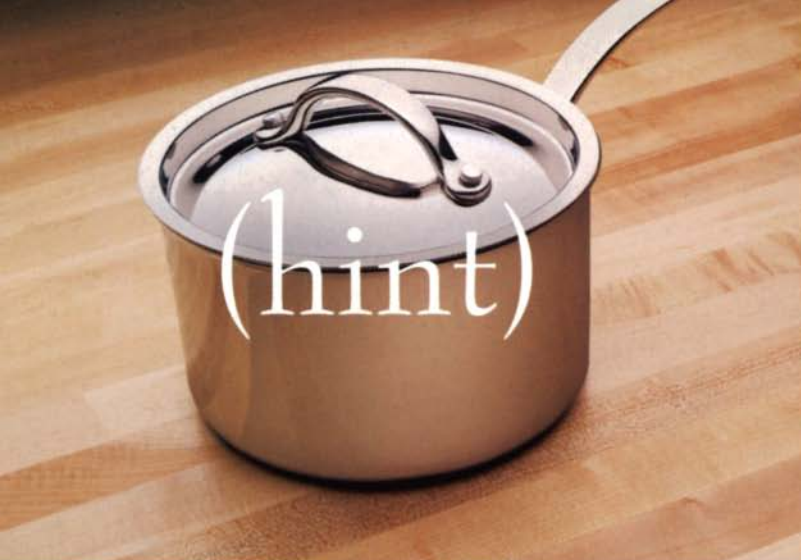


Martha Rose Shulman ("Salt Cod Classics," p. 61) once travelled to Paris to live for a year—and wound up staying for twelve. While there, she ran a "supper club" in her own home, an experience she recounted in her book, *Martha Rose Shulman's Feasts & Fêtes*. She also travelled to Provence often, where she first learned to cook salt cod. Now living back in her native Los Angeles, Martha has translated her incredible passion for food and cooking into twenty cookbooks, and she has developed a specialty in creating lighter versions of classic foods, while writing books such as *Mediterranean Light* and *Provençal Light*.

A recent recruit to the world of working moms, **Jan Newberry** ("Pressure Cookers," p. 64) has been using her pressure cooker recently to make

meals for her toddler. Jan is a former managing editor of *Fine Cooking* who now lives in Oakland, California, where she is the food and wine editor of *San Francisco* magazine.





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Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.

Index redux

As we did in 1999, we're replacing the year-end index with a searchable index on our web site that covers all seven years of publication. As a quick reference, however, we're printing a one-page index of all the recipes published in *Fine Cooking* in 2000, issues 37-42 (see p. 88).

To use the web site index, go to www.finecooking.com, click on Magazine Index, and type in a key word, such as eggplant or lamb, and you'll get a list of entries. Click on the one you want and you'll see the issue and page numbers where the article or recipe appeared in the magazine.

In addition to the web site index, a printed version of the 2000 year-end index is available at no charge through our customer service department. Just call 800/888-8286.

Make cajeta safely

A few readers commented on the letter to the editor in *Fine Cooking* #41, p. 8, about making cajeta by boiling an unopened can of sweetened condensed milk for a few hours. We asked Eagle Family Foods (makers of sweetened condensed milk) about this traditional method and were told that they don't recommend it, even though it's been practiced for years, because there's a slim chance that the can could explode.

To make great cajeta safely, use the method in Jim Peyton's ice cream article (*Fine Cooking* #40, p. 55).

Who put the sugar in the sauce?

At first I was excited to see "How to Make Great Italian

Meat Sauces" on the cover of *Fine Cooking* #41, but I was quickly dismayed. Before reading the article, I scanned the recipe and was disappointed to see the author's use of sugar in her sauces.

I come from a very long line of Italians and at no time in my life have I or any of my relatives used sugar in tomato sauce. Onion is a natural sweetener and can be increased to create more sweetness. In addition, pork feet or chicken feet can be simmered in the sauce (a very old trick that also creates a natural sweetness) and enjoyed with the meat course. They can also be discarded if the diners are squeamish.

The myth that sugar belongs in tomato sauce is hard enough to dispel without it appearing in print in such a respected magazine. I thoroughly enjoy the technical nature of *Fine Cooking* and look forward to each issue. Thanks for hearing me out.

—Louise A. Peterson,
via e-mail

I need good food—fast

The article on grilling potatoes in *Fine Cooking* #39, p. 44, really caught my attention.

I'm a new mom who works full time, and I don't seem to have as much time as I used to for cooking. I have had to find shortcuts, which many people may find sacrilegious, in order to have great dinners without eating at 10 P.M.

One such shortcut that I found is to use unseasoned frozen steak fries in the grilled potato recipe with the mayonnaise and mustard. I mix the sauce and coat the frozen potatoes, and then either let them sit and thaw or cook

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Fine Cooking: (ISSN: 1072-5121) is published bimonthly by The Taunton Press, Inc., Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Telephone (203) 426-8171. Periodicals postage paid at Newtown, CT 06470 and at additional mailing offices. GST paid registration #123210981. U.S. distribution by Curtis Circulation Company, 730 River Road, New Milford, NJ 07646-3048 and Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Route 250, Milan, OH 44846-9705.

Subscription Rates: U.S. and Canada, \$29.95 for one year, \$49.95 for two years, \$69.95 for three years (GST included, payable in U.S. funds). Outside the U.S./Canada: \$36 for one year, \$62 for two years, \$88 for three years (payable in U.S. funds). Single copy, \$5.95. Single copy outside the U.S., \$6.95.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Fine Cooking*, The Taunton Press, Inc., 63 South Main St., P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

Printed in the USA.



HOW TO CONTACT US:

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Newtown, CT 06470-5506 (203) 426-8171
www.finecooking.com

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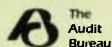
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profile

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LETTERS

them immediately on the grill. They come out great. This is a nice alternative for anyone who's short on time or who doesn't want to boil water on a really hot day.

—Karin Arai,
Cheshire CT

The risks of rare hamburgers are real

I was enjoying the special insert on grilling in *Fine Cooking* #40 until I reached the recommendations on hamburgers. To mention cooking

ground beef to a rare or medium-rare state without the appropriate cautions regarding the dangers of food-borne illness, particularly that caused by *E. coli* 0157-H7, is the height of editorial irresponsibility. Even though the numerical risk of encountering this organism is very small, it nonetheless exists. Since it only requires a very few cells of this pathogen to provide an infective dose, it is nothing to be trifled with. While it might not affect a normal healthy

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ◆ Butter is unsalted.
- ◆ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ◆ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ◆ Sugar is granulated.
- ◆ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ◆ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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November 13–15: Contributing editor and test kitchen director Abby Dodge teaches classes at four Dierbergs stores in the St. Louis, Missouri, area: Southroads (11/13; 314/849-3698), West Oak (11/14; 314/432-6505), Clarkson (11/14; 636/394-9504), and Mid Rivers (11/15; 636/928-5888).

November 29–30: Editor Martha Holmberg teaches a holiday menu class at Cooks of Crocus Hill in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area: Edina (11/29; 952/285-1903) and St. Paul (11/30; 651/228-1333).

January 20–21: *Fine Cooking* is sponsoring the Boston Wine Expo at the World Trade Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Come to our booth to meet the editors, and watch cooking demonstrations by contributing editor Molly Stevens and frequent author Joanne Chang. For more info, call 877/946-3976.

Plus: Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from the pages of *Fine Cooking* on her "Nothing to It" television segments, airing on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

adult, anyone with incomplete immune systems, such as children, the elderly, or anyone with a compromised immune system, is at particular risk. The only real insurance is to cook the meat in such a way that all potentially contaminated areas reach 160°F. That is no problem with a steak or roasts, since even a piece of solid muscle that's rare inside will have reached that temperature on the sur-

face, where contamination may be. Ground beef is a different story, however. Here any surface contamination—if present—is mixed throughout the patty, and the only way to ensure safety is to cook the patty to an internal temperature of 160°F.

—Robert E. Rust,
Professor Emeritus
of Meat Science,
Iowa State University,
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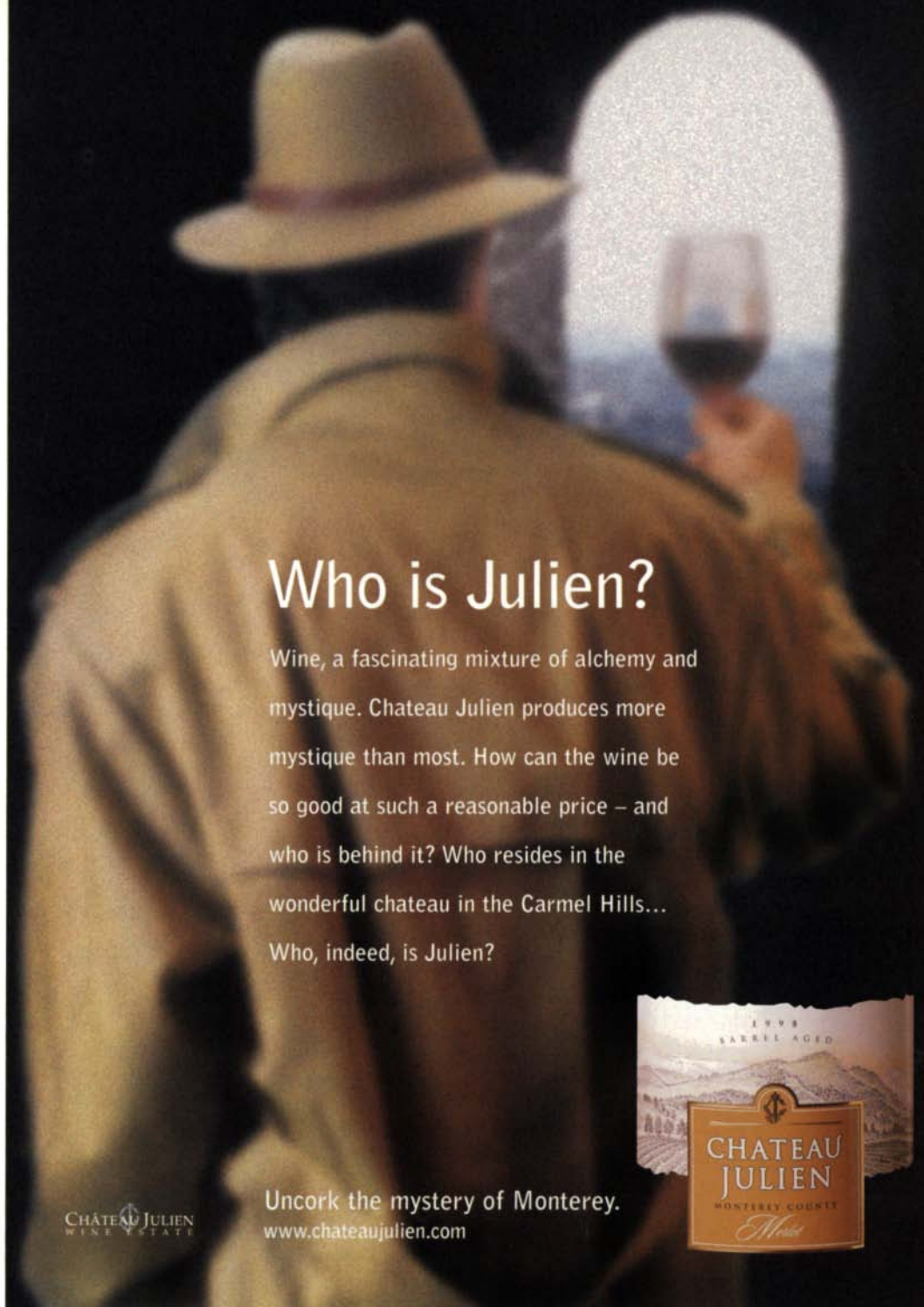
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Exploring banana varieties


Fresh bananas are the most popular fruit in this country, and their sweet, honey-like flavor and comforting custardy texture are familiar to all of us. These tasty and nutritious (they're one of the best sources of potassium) treats from the tropics are especially inviting in cold winter months. There are many ways to enjoy them both fresh and cooked—in appetizers, main dishes, and desserts.

Long, short, red, yellow

The different varieties of yellow bananas, baby bananas, red bananas, and plantains now available offer great chances to try out new cooking ideas, especially since these rich-flavored, sweet fruits are used widely in many of the world's tastiest cuisines at all stages of ripeness. Besides ripe bananas' familiar place in fruit salads, smoothies, pancakes, quick breads, and pies, green bananas and barely ripe ones are delicious in savory dishes like Caribbean stews and curries, in African or Thai curries, and in chutneys and salsas.

Bananas don't really grow on trees, but on stalks formed by sheaths of thick big leaves; the fruits are actually the plant's berries. Botanically, bananas belong to a larger family of plants that includes lilies, ginger, orchids, and palms.

Bananas are grown commercially in the tropics and subtropics of Central and South America for export to the United States. Fruit from



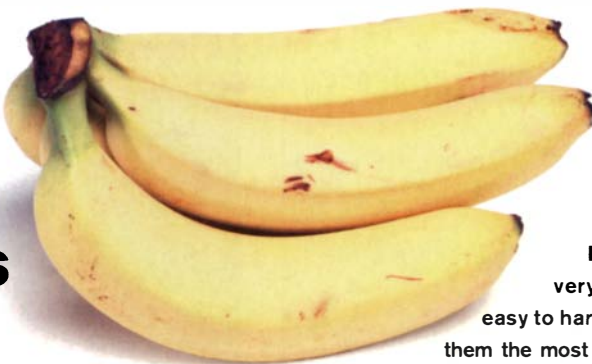
Red bananas have reddish-purple skin and slightly pink, creamy flesh. They're often sweeter than yellow bananas, with a touch of raspberry flavor. When ripe, their skins should have a purple hue. Choose those that are still slightly firm. Red bananas are great for eating fresh, for fruit salads, and in pancakes and quick breads.



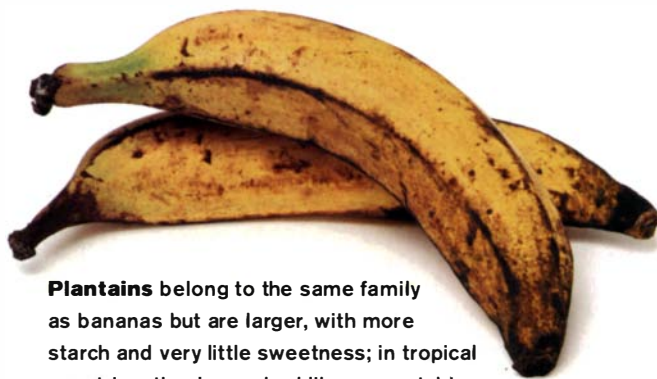
Baby, niño, or ladyfinger bananas have a firm texture. They're delicious for eating fresh or tossing in fruit salads. To best enjoy their luscious flavor, be sure they're fully ripe before eating: look for a deep yellow, well-spotted skin.

the Caribbean and Africa supply most of Europe.

Bananas are picked while still very green and shipped in refrigerated cargo holds, where they're ripened in special facilities with gradually warming temperatures and harmless ethylene gas until they're ready to be shipped to



Cavendish bananas are very reliable and easy to harvest, making them the most widely available variety and, until recently, just about the only one sold in most markets. When ripe, Cavendish bananas are a rich yellow with little brown spots. They're good for most recipes, but they don't have the flavor nuances of the more exotic varieties.



Plantains belong to the same family as bananas but are larger, with more starch and very little sweetness; in tropical countries, they're cooked like a vegetable. Once these large, rather tough-skinned bananas are peeled (you'll need to use a knife), they can be baked, grilled, boiled, sautéed, mashed like potatoes, or fried into delicious chips. Plantains have a mild flavor and are used in curries, stews, and chutneys at every stage of ripeness.

markets. In this nearly ripe commercial stage, a yellow color begins to show through the bright green.

A banana keeps ripening on the shelf

When shopping for bananas, look for those with no cracks or bruises.

Buy bananas tinged with green if you don't plan to eat them right away: they ripen naturally off the plant. Keep them at room temperature; they ripen best that way. (Some people insist on hanging them on a hook to ripen, but I've never felt the need, although this works to hasten even ripening.) Generally, a

yellow banana that's ripe enough to eat should be fully and completely yellow with a few black spots freckling its skin. It should give slightly to the touch, peel easily, and have a fruity, fragrant smell.

Whether you like bananas slightly underripe and firm, as opposed to softer, sweeter, and riper, is a matter of preference. Very ripe, blackened bananas can be good for cakes and breads, but avoid overripe ones with a fermented odor.

Renee Shepherd is a gardening cook and specialty seed retailer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries. ♦

The Holiday Season... a time of Paradox & Magic

Ahhh, the Holiday Season, a time of paradox and magic. Why do all of those great dishes and desserts do such wicked things to our waist lines? Why is it that so many of our favorite traditions are so stressful? We'd like to try and give you a couple of pleasant magical paradoxes for the Holidays.

First at King's Nature Ranch we can provide you with meats for the Holiday Season that have wonderful, traditional, red-meat flavor; but with up to 75% less fat than beef or pork. In fact, speaking of tradition, Bison, Ostrich and Elk meats have about half the fat of turkey or skinless chicken. The paradox is that you can save your calories for dessert, and still enjoy a wonderfully exotic gourmet meal. The magic is how enjoyable eating healthy can taste.

At King's Nature Ranch, we are the producers of fine quality Iowa Bison, Iowa Ostrich and Iowa Elk meats. Our meats are all grain and pasture fed for taste and texture, and then harvested at the optimum time for tenderness and flavor. Our products are all hormone and anti-biotic free. We never use any animal by-products in our feeds. We are USDA inspected at our own expense, because we care about our quality and our customer's well being.

Our second Holiday paradox is stress. We shop for days and days, putting up with "mall stress" and crazy traffic trying to find that perfectly unique gift for a friend or loved one. We torture ourselves. This year we'd like to recommend the King's Nature Ranch Gift Shop. With a toll-free call to one of our friendly phone representatives, we can give you hassle-free, one stop gift shopping and have it delivered on the perfect day.. No crazy traffic. No mall stress. No torture. Our Premium Steak Packages make very tasteful Holiday gifts and we also carry a great selection of fine quality ostrich leather products and gifts. These gifts are both perfect and unique. (Catalog available upon request.)

So break with some of those old stressful traditions and start some new ones. Get away from the paradox and start enjoying the magic of the Holiday Season with your family. Join us in the King's Nature Ranch tradition. Great food. Great gifts. No hassle. No traffic. And all of those calories just for dessert!

See our ad for the Holiday Sampler Package on page 85 in this issue.

*Nutritional information available upon request.



Photos: PJ Rhoden & kfx/alterd-states!!!



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King Wenceslaus Roast

1 Iowa Bison, Ostrich or Elk Tenderloin 1-2#
1 dozen fresh cherries
6T's honey
1 dozen fresh red raspberries
6 T's brown sugar
fi cup of chopped pecans

fi T ginger
fi chopped green onions
fi to 1 full shot of brandy (plain or fruit flavored)
fi cup chives
1 t (flat) minced garlic
fi cup chopped celery

Combine cherries, raspberries, pecans, onions, chives and celery. Chop to the consistency of Baklav walnut paste. Add 4T's honey, ginger, 4T's brown sugar, brandy, garlic, salt and pepper. You might want to do this a day in advance to allow the spices and brandy to marinate and really soak into the the chopped mixture.

About one hour before before dinner, butterfly the tenderloin, cover with plastic wrap and pound flat. Salt and pepper and lightly, drizzle and spread remaining 2T's of honey and 2T's of brown sugar over surface of the tenderloin. Spoon drain excess liquid off the marinade and spread evenly over tenderloin. Roll and hold in place with toothpicks. Place in a foil lined roasting pan. Spread any remaining fruit and nut mixture over the top.

Roast at 350 degrees, covered for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Cook with your thermometer not your timer. Remove cover to brown. The roast is done when it reaches rare. The roast will continue to cook after the roast is removed from the oven. Best served rare to medium rare. Remove let stand 5-10 minutes before slicing and serving. By then the roast should be medium rare.

We saved the drippings and any loose fruit and nut mixture for our Yorkshire pudding. We served the Wenslaus Roast and Yorkshire pudding with Carrots ala Ginger, Marvelous Mint Potatoes, and several scandalous desserts. Don't forget to remove the toothpicks before serving. All of these pictured recipes are available on our website at IOWAboe.com.

Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Get a frothy, stable milk foam for cappuccino

I have an espresso maker, and some days I can get it to froth milk beautifully, other days hardly at all. What's the technique for steaming the milk to a nice stable foam?

—Robert Lemieux,
Redway, CA

Sheila Bride replies: Frothing milk well takes practice as well as proper technique. Give yourself a good running start by using skim milk that's very cold. The lower the fat content in the milk, the easier it is to achieve a dry, stiff froth.



For the best froth, use skim milk and proper technique.

Choose a tall stainless-steel pitcher; it should be able to accommodate the length of the steam wand in order to heat the milk thoroughly after it's frothed.

As for technique, you need all your senses. First clear the wand of any excess water by opening the valve fully and then closing it (keep your hands clear of the wand and have a cup under it to catch the hot water). Submerge the tip of the steam wand halfway into the cold pitcher of milk and then fully open the valve.

Quickly lower the pitcher so the tip of the wand is just below the surface of the milk. Listen for a hissing sound—if you hear a rumble, the wand is too deep—and look for a dimple in the milk at the start. Soon foam will form and the dimple will disappear. You're aiming for small bubbles, which are more stable. If the bubbles are very large, raise the pitcher so the wand dips slightly farther into the milk for a few seconds and then lower it again. Once you've got a nice buildup of foam, plunge the wand to the bottom of the pitcher to heat the rest of the milk, if it's not yet warmed. When the pitcher becomes almost too hot to touch, it has reached the ideal temperature, which is between 140° and 160°F. If the milk gets too much hotter than that, it will start to smell scalded.

For a more stable foam, let the milk sit for a minute and then tap the pitcher on the counter before pouring it into your cup. And for a creamier “head,” hold back the foam with a spoon as you pour milk into the cup, letting the foam fall in last.

Sheila Bride owns Petaluma Coffee & Tea Company in California.

At what temperature is bread done?

I read that an instant-read thermometer is a good way to check bread for doneness. To what temperature should I bake it?

—Michelle Graydon,
via e-mail

Peter Reinhart replies: Why use an instant-read thermometer to check bread, when thumping the bottom of

the loaf and listening for a hollow sounding “thwack” will do? Mainly because a thermometer gives you even more control. Technically, a loaf of bread isn't fully baked until its center reaches at least 180°F. At that temperature, the flour's starch will have partly gelatinized, which needs to happen if you want a “breadly” bread rather than a doughy one. Using a thermometer ensures that you've hit that minimum temperature.

For crustier, hearth-style loaves, such as ciabattas, baguettes, and other rustic breads, minimum gelatinization of the starch isn't enough. We also want rich caramelization of the sugars in the crust and a deep roasting of the proteins (such as gluten) for the fullest flavor. I like to push these loaves to about 205°F to drive off more moisture and to gelatinize the starches more fully. When completely cooled, these breads should taste creamy rather than dry or dusty. Often, the interior looks shiny and translucent due to complete gelatinization of the starches.

To get a proper temperature reading, insert the thermometer into the center of the loaf (from the bottom or top) when you think it's close to done. If you're using a loaf pan for sandwich bread, you can poke the thermometer through the top, or else remove the bread from the pan and poke through the bottom. If necessary, return the loaf to the pan or else finish baking it directly on the oven shelf. In the latter case, the bread will finish very quickly, rising as much as 10°F in two minutes. I bake my sandwich loaves to 185°F, but I pull out smaller

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Q&A

bread like dinner rolls as soon as they pass the magic 180°F.

A final note: regardless of the temperature reading, I always thump my bread anyway, as insurance (after all, a thermometer can be wrong) and because I really enjoy hearing that wonderful sound.

Peter Reinhart, a breadbaking instructor at Johnson & Wales University, is the author of Crust & Crumb (Ten Speed Press) and Bread Upon the Waters (Perseus Books).

Getting that pastry brush really clean

After dipping my pastry brush in melted butter, oil, or an egg wash, how should I clean it?

—Johanna Strauss,
Ridgefield, CT

Carole Walter replies: It's important to properly clean



To thoroughly clean a pastry brush, soak it in very hot water with a dab of detergent; repeat as needed.

your pastry brushes, not just for sanitary reasons, but also because they'll last longer.

To clean my brushes, I put a few drops of dish detergent

in a Pyrex or other heatproof cup, fill it with almost-boiling water (I have a boiling water tap on my sink; without it, I'd heat the water in a kettle),

and soak the brush in the soapy water for about 15 minutes, working it around a little to dislodge and dissolve any congealed fat or other gunky particles. I then pour out the dirty water and repeat the process two or three more times. This has kept my collection of brushes in near-new condition for many, many years.

One more tip is to dedicate one brush for sweet dishes and another for savory, just in case some flavors do remain. Also, if you're brushing sauce onto hot foods on the grill, the ends of the bristles get singed after a few uses, and the rough tips could scratch pastry dough.

Carole Walter, the author of Great Pies & Tarts (Clarkson Potter), teaches baking around the country. ♦

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Merry baking

The Baker's Dozen gift pack from Penzeys Spices will be appreciated by both beginning bakers (who might not have a supply of cocoa, ground cloves, and ginger) and experienced bakers, who will like the high quality of the Dutch Blue poppy seeds and the Ceylon and Cassia cinnamons. As a bonus, the box of spices comes packed with a real Madagascar vanilla bean, cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, and nutmegs (\$52.95; 800/741-7787 or www.penzeys.com).

Instead of a bow, top the gift pack with this handsome set of six stainless-steel measuring spoons (including an 1/8 teaspoon) designed to make scooping and measuring spices easier (\$9.95 from Sur La Table, 800/243-0852 or www.surlatable.com).



No more knuckle-bumping

If you're tired of scraping your knuckles while trying to slice a really crusty loaf of bread, put this new 10-inch offset bread knife on your wish list. This high-carbon stainless-steel blade with very sharp teeth from LamsonSharp is one of the longest blades we've seen that's offset, too, and strong enough to cut through those prized but challenging crusts on artisan loaves. It's \$39.99 from Professional Cutlery Direct (800/859-6994 or www.cutlery.com).

Affordable stemware by Waterford

Sturdy, elegant, simple wine-glasses are hard to come by, especially affordable ones, which is why Waterford Vintage Marquis stemware is such a find. These glasses feel great in your hand, are roomy enough for proper swirling and tasting, have a smoothly polished lip, don't break the bank—and they'll chime nicely as you clink to toast the season. White wine, Burgundy, Bordeaux, and Champagne glasses come in sets of four for \$49. To order, call Wine & All That Jazz at 800/610-7731, or call Waterford USA at 732/938-5800 for the distributor nearest you.



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Instead of a tangerine at the toe of your Christmas stocking, why not ask for tangerine olive oil instead? Agrumato citrus oils (orange, lemon, and tangerine), imported by the Manicaretti company from the Abruzzo region of Italy, are made by pressing the citrus fruits along with olives. The oils are smooth and taste intensely of the fruit itself, without the bitter or off flavors of lesser quality infused oils. Use them sparingly as a condiment for grilled seafood, warm salads, toasted peasant bread, or hearty soups. They're available in gourmet specialty stores such as Hay Day/Sutton Place and from www.ChefShop.com for about \$20 for 200ml. ChefShop will special-order the oils or any of the high-quality products imported by Manicaretti if you don't see them on the site.

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Sweet, nutty Roaring '40s Blue

This year, forget the Stilton and treat yourself to a wedge of Roaring Forties blue cheese from King Island Dairy in Australia. This incredibly delicious cow's milk blue has a creamy texture (kept moist by a wax rind) and a sweet, nutty flavor that makes it equally comfortable in a green salad or on a cheese board. All of King Island Dairy's award-winning cheeses (including two more blues, Endeavor and Bass Strait Blue, as well as Seal Bay Triple Cream and Stormy Washed Rind) are terrific, but Roaring Forties is the most widely available right now. Whole Foods, Fresh Fields, Bread & Circus, Hay Day/Sutton Place, Balducci's, and Fairway all carry it for about \$15 to \$19 per pound.



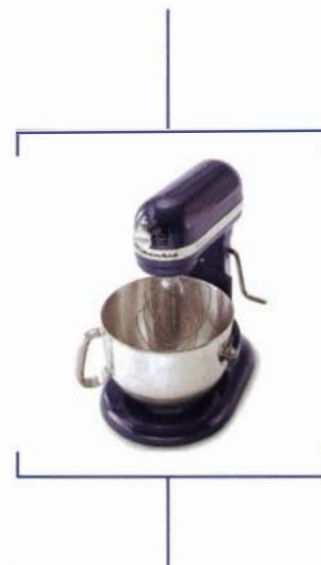
A 4-quart chef's pan is a versatile tool

If you're thinking of adding a multipurpose pan to your collection, this one from Calphalon's commercial nonstick line could just be the one. This gently rounded, generously sized pot with two well-balanced, stay-cool handles, a domed lid, and a durable multilayered nonstick coating is the perfect thing for improvising weeknight ragoûts and braises, for making big batches of creamy polenta or risotto, or for whipping up a quick soup or pasta sauce. It's oven-safe to 450°F and carries a lifetime guarantee from Calphalon. If you like the shape of the pan but would prefer a stainless interior, keep your eyes open for Calphalon's newest line—commercial stainless pots and pans—due in stores this winter. The 4-quart commercial nonstick chef's pan is about \$124 from

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order, it can take up to ten weeks for delivery, but the good news is that shipping will only cost you \$9.99 (the tables are shipped directly from John Boos). For more information, call PCD at 800/859-6994, check out the PCD catalog, or visit the company's web site at www.cutlery.com.



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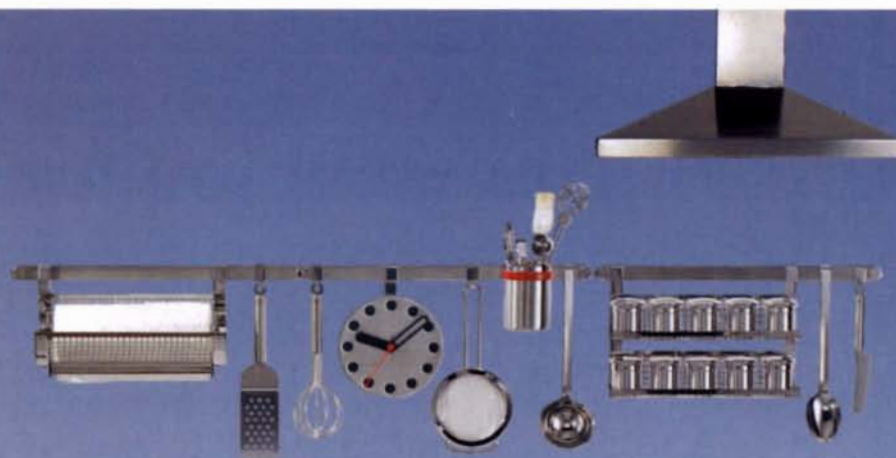


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Glazing vegetables for richer flavor

Glazed vegetables are simply too good to make only once or twice a year at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Glazing not only gives vegetables a jewel-like sheen but also concentrates their flavor. Another plus: glazed vegetables go well with all kinds of main courses, from a whole beef tenderloin to roast goose. You can serve them on their own in a bowl, but I think they look smashing arranged on a platter with the roast.

Glazing means to cook a vegetable in a small amount of liquid, such as water or broth, with some butter and sugar in a partially covered pan. As the vegetable cooks, it releases its own savory juices into the liquid in the



pan. Those juices become concentrated and turn into a light natural syrup as the vegetable cooks. By the time the vegetable is tender, the liquid is almost all gone and the vegetable is coated

with a shiny, savory glaze that captures the vegetable's sweet essence.

Two kinds of glazing: white and brown. The two kinds of glazing are determined by how long the vege-

table is cooked. A white-glazed vegetable is cooked only long enough for the liquid to evaporate and glaze the vegetable lightly. For a brown glaze, the vegetable is cooked a little longer—often uncovered—until the glaze on the bottom of the pan lightly caramelizes and browns. A small amount of water or broth is then added to dissolve the caramelized juices so that they'll coat the vegetable. (A little cream added at this stage is also delicious.)

Pay attention to heat and timing

For the most even cooking, glaze the vegetable in a pan wide enough to accommodate the pieces in a single layer. I

Glazed vegetables need a little sugar, butter, liquid, and time



Cut large vegetables into chunks or wedges and arrange in a sauté pan just large enough to hold the pieces in a single layer. Add a few pats of butter and a sprinkling of sugar.



Add enough liquid to come halfway up the sides of the pieces. Water alone is good, or use half water and half broth for a fuller flavor. A little wine or sherry added near the end boosts flavor.



Cover the vegetable pieces with a round of parchment (or a pot lid askew), bring the liquid to a high simmer, and then lower the heat and simmer gently.

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Test for doneness



Start testing after 15 minutes. A knife should penetrate easily with just some slight resistance. Adjust the liquid level depending on doneness.

usually add 1 or 2 tablespoons butter and ½ to 1 teaspoon sugar per pound of vegetable, and then I season lightly with salt and pepper. I add enough liquid to come about halfway up the sides of the pieces. Partially covering the vegetable for most of the cooking keeps it moist and retains flavor. You can use the pan's lid, slightly askew, or cut a round of kitchen parchment to fit just inside the pan.

Glazing is fairly straightforward, but the variables involved—the type and size of vegetable, the size of the pan, the amount of liquid, and the temperature—mean you have to be ready to do some tweaking as the vegetable cooks. Simmer the vegetable gently. If the heat is too high, the liquid will evaporate before the vegetable is tender.

This isn't a problem as long as you're paying attention—simply add more liquid when needed. On the other hand, if the heat is too low, the vegetable will overcook before the liquid cooks down to a sumptuous glaze. If the vegetable is tender but there's a lot of liquid left in the pan, turn up the heat and remove the cover to boil away the liquid.

Start checking for doneness after about 15 minutes, depending on the vegetable. It's done when all the liquid has evaporated, or, in the case of brown glazing, a brown glaze forms on the bottom of the pan. When done to your liking, add a tablespoon of water to the pan and swirl the vegetable pieces around until they're coated with a shiny glaze. A sprinkling of finely chopped herbs, such as pars-

ley, basil, mint, or chervil, will give the vegetable a bit of color and a fresh flavor.

Experiment with onions and root vegetables

Heartier vegetables work best because they take a while to cook, allowing the braising liquid to become deliciously concentrated.

Glazed beets have a delicate flavor. I like to use baby beets because they require no peeling or precooking. If you use large beets, boil or roast them first until almost tender and then cut them into wedges before glazing.

Glazed carrots are classic. These are best made with fresh carrots bought with the greens still attached. I cut the carrots into similar-size pieces, and if I'm feeling really fancy I round their edges with

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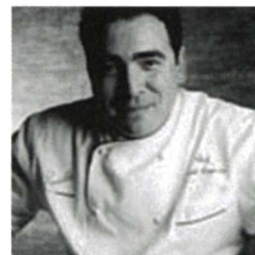
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a small paring knife. On lazier days, I grab a bag of baby carrots at the supermarket, which already have their edges rounded off (no doubt by some giant machine).

Glazed chestnuts say Christmas and are great with game. I like to use a combination of port and broth for the glazing.

Glazed onions and shallots are a favorite winter dish. Tiny pearl onions are pretty to look at and fun to eat but tedious to peel. Instead, I often search for tiny white onions—walnut-size is best—and glaze those. To make creamed onions, add a quarter cup of cream at the end instead of water and simmer until the cream thickens slightly and coats the onions.

Glazed parsnips need less sugar since they're naturally

Finish by deglazing the pan



To finish glazing the vegetable, add a tablespoon of water and turn the heat to high. Swirl until the pieces are coated with a shiny glaze. Season and serve.

sweet. I sometimes leave the sugar out completely when glazing parsnips because too much sugar will mask their subtlety and can also make them too sweet to accompany

roasted meats. I cut them in sections as I do carrots.

Glazed turnips are a pleasant surprise. The subtle bitterness of turnips makes a pleasing contrast to the

slightly sweet glaze. If you're using turnips in the middle of winter, parboil peeled and cut-up turnips for 5 minutes to remove some of their bitterness. Glazed turnips are sublime topped with bits of crisp bacon; use some of the bacon fat in place of the butter to glaze them.

While it is possible to glaze different vegetables together—they just need to be cut the same size to cook in the same time—the flavors tend to merge and lose their distinction. To keep the flavors more discrete, I glaze each vegetable separately and combine them just before serving.

James Peterson is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking. Among his many award-winning books is Vegetables (William Morrow). ♦

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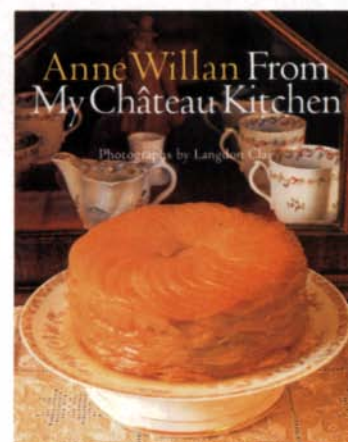
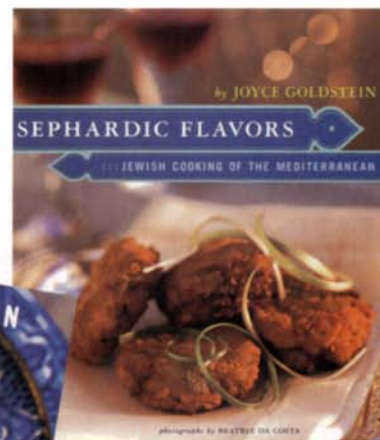
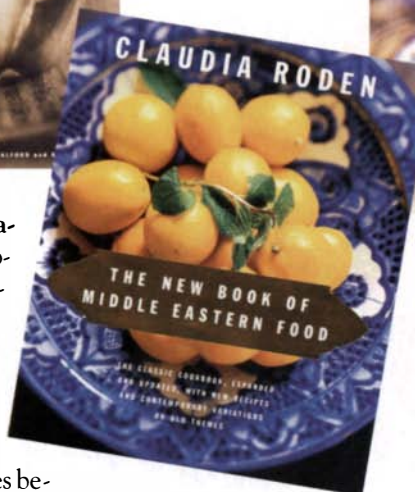
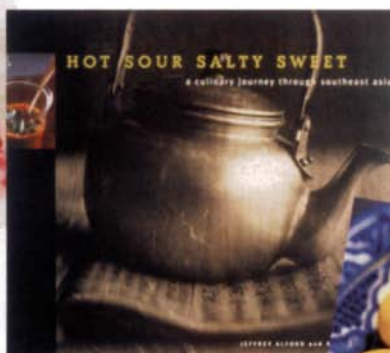
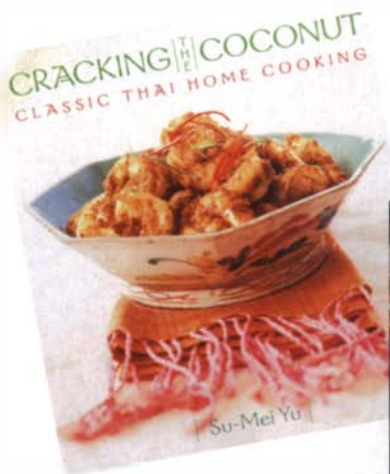
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A cookbook (or two) for every shelf



Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the bookstore (or on the Internet), a whole new crop of great cookbooks comes along. I hope you don't have as much trouble making a *short* holiday wish list (or gift list) as I did.

Cooks who want to explore a new cuisine without leaving their own kitchens are really in luck this season. At the top of my list would be **Cracking the Coconut: Classic Thai Home Cooking** (William Morrow, \$30), by San Diego chef Su-Mei Yu. **Reasons:** Meticulously written recipes (with helpful suggestions and substitutions always offered) and an easy-to-follow recipe format (though I'd wish for more photos); thorough research (on her annual visits to her homeland); a compelling passion for the process of cooking Thai food ("I realized...that cooking is not a chore, but a creative process, a gift we give ourselves and those we love"); the utmost respect for technique, from steaming rice to grinding spices in a mortar for the most flavorful curry paste.

To broaden the scope to all of Southeast Asia, I'd look at **Hot Sour Salty Sweet** (Artisan, \$40), by itinerant cook-photographers Jeffery Alford

and Naomi Duguid. **Reasons:** 150 stunning photographs; the 175 straightforward recipes like Classic Mixed Vegetable Stir-Fry (*Pad Pak*) and Spicy Grilled Beef Salad; the authors' unique perspective on the similarities between the cuisines along the Mekong River from Burma to Vietnam, gleaned from their intensive travels among the villages and towns.

Next, I'd add a book I think any serious cook would want to own: **The New Book of Middle Eastern Food** (Knopf, \$35), by Claudia Roden. **Reasons:** a complete reworking of Roden's classic 1972 cookbook, with new recipes and updated techniques; the 800 recipes for every classic Middle Eastern dish you know you want to cook (Tabbouleh, Hummus, Baba Ganouj, Falafel, Stuffed Grape Leaves, Bstilla, Mousaka, Tagines) and many more you never knew about; the easy-on-the-eyes two-column recipe format.

I'd add one more Mediterranean cookbook to my collection: **Sephardic Flavors: Jewish Cooking of the Medi-**

terranean (Chronicle, \$35), by San Francisco Bay area chef and teacher Joyce Goldstein. **Reasons:** intriguing history; Goldstein's mouth-watering recipes (Tomato Bread Pudding, Leek & Cheese Matzoh Pie, Garlic Soup, Sicilian Potato Croquettes, Lamb with Green Garlic, Chicken with Apples & Apricots, Chicken with Roasted Eggplant Purée...).

Stopping off in France, I'd revel in the delights of Burgundy with **Anne Willan: From My Château Kitchen** (Clarkson Potter, \$45). **Reasons:** Breathtaking photos of Burgundy's farms, vineyards, and luscious bounty; a heartfelt personal account of cooking school director Anne Willan's life and work and all the colorful people involved in it at Château du Fey and the surrounding countryside; the

best of Willan's robust cooking, with recipes like Roast Duck with Apples, Hot Bacon Salad, Warm Wild Mushroom Mousse, and Apple Gâteau with Honey Caramel Sauce.

For an intensive crash course in Mexican cooking, I'd be covered by two new books: **The Essential Cuisines of Mexico** (Clarkson Potter, \$35), a compilation of three of Diana Kennedy's books; and **Mexico, One Plate at a Time** (Scribner, \$35), by Rick Bayless. **Reasons:** Kennedy's *The Cuisines of Mexico*, *The Tortilla Book*, and *Mexican Regional Cooking* all rolled into one volume of 300 very thorough yet newly

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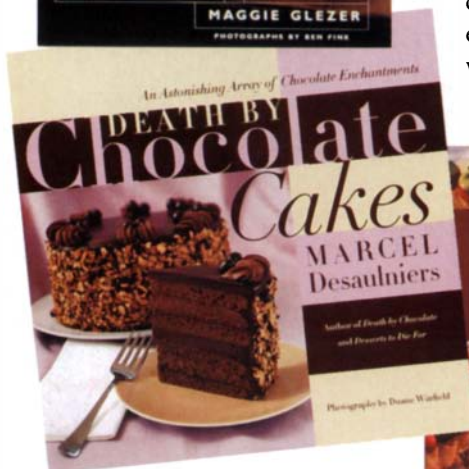
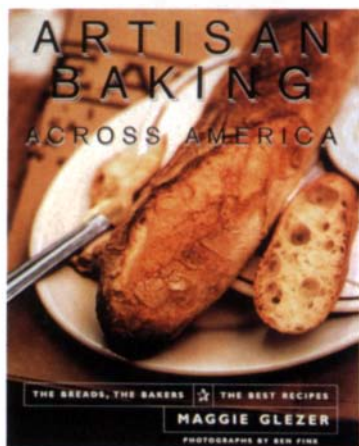
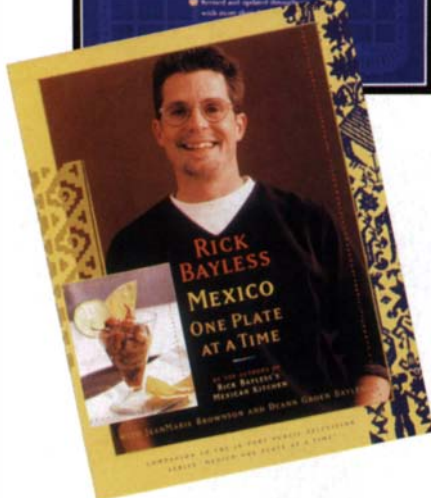
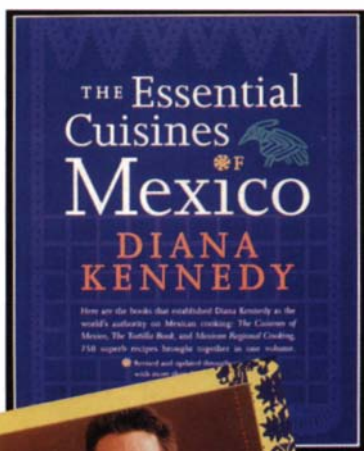
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Fine Cooking contributing editors in print

Here at *Fine Cooking*, we're especially excited to see two new books on the shelves written by our hard-working and talented contributing editors Abigail Johnson Dodge and Molly Stevens. Dodge's new book, ***The Kid's Cookbook*** (Time-Life, \$19.95) from Williams-Sonoma, is a bright, colorful collection of delicious recipes and easy-to-follow tips for kids 9 to 13 who are getting interested in cooking. Dodge's recipes (from Cheddar Cornbread Wedges and Crunchy Coated Chicken Breasts to Homemade Ice-Cream Sandwiches and Buttery Pecan Cookies), which are short on ingredients and long on flavor, make this cookbook one adults will appreciate, too. The knock-your-socks-off colorful graphics and spiral binding (with a hard cover) are icing on the cake.



Stevens is the author of ***New England*** (Time-Life, \$22.95), one of four books just published in Williams-Sonoma's *New American Cooking* series. *New England* is a colorful blend of full-flavored recipes like Baked Macaroni & Sharp Cheddar, Chicken & Portobello Pot Pie, Lobster Rolls, and Stove-Top Clambake (each on its own page with a full-page color photo opposite) and short, informative essays and photographs of classic New England food topics, like fishing and cheesemaking. We especially like Stevens's insight into how the hearty character of New England's people has shaped this simple, robust cuisine.



updated recipes; Bayless's most accessible book yet (a companion to his television series), highlighting Mexican classics like tamales, tacos, enchiladas, and ceviches, while offering modern variations, lots of helpful tips, and

question-and-answer sections in each chapter.

There are also some excellent books for aspiring bakers and pastry makers this season. If you want to learn to bake a crusty loaf (or just appreciate one), I highly recommend ***Artisan Baking Across America*** (Artisan, \$40), by Atlanta baker Maggie Glezer (a frequent contributor to *Fine Cooking*). **Reasons:** A rare combination of clear writing, meticulous recipes, and abundant expertise from both the author and her subjects—the bakers and millers who have spurred the growth of artisan baking in this country; step-

by-step instructions for making Thom Leonard's Country French Bread, Gray's Gristmill Thin Jonnycakes, Della Fattoria's Rustic Roasted Garlic Bread, Sullivan Street Potato Pizza, and more; big, evocative photos of everything glorious about baking bread, from threshing wheat to kneading and mixing.

To master "the art of making bite-size desserts," I'd turn to San Francisco baker Flo Braker's ***Sweet Miniatures*** (Chronicle Books, \$22.95). **Reasons:** Braker wants you to succeed and cheers you on with detailed recipes and lots of technique notes; this is an updated bible of Braker's expert, detailed, always-delicious recipes for a range of charming miniature cookies, cakes, and pastries, from Chocolate Pistachio Cigarettes to Neapolitan Wedges. One complaint: the book is too small; it could use more photos and larger pages to prevent the recipes from running over three pages.

To learn to bake the perfect chocolate cake, I'd first have to decide on which one to make from Chef Marcel Desaulniers's fifth (and best) book, ***Death by Chocolate Cakes*** (William Morrow, \$35). **Reasons:** "Babycakes" (Chocolate Heart of Darkness Cakes, Chocolate Pistachio Madeleines, Chocolate Chunk Cookie Cakes); "Mom's Cakes" (Aunt Cecil's Cocoa Walnut Crunch Cake); "Celebration Cakes" (Mrs. D's Chocolate Birthday Extravaganza Cake, Mocha Mud Cake with Espresso Chocolate Chunk Mud Slide); plenty of technique talk, chef's tips, and a full-color photo for every cake.

Susie Middleton is the managing editor of *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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Diamond Walnut and Blue Cheese Tart with Cranberries



CRUST

1 cup flour
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup Diamond Ground Walnuts
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1 tablespoon sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon dry mustard
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

3 ounces cold unsalted butter,
 cut into cubes
 1 to 2 tablespoons milk

Pulse dry ingredients and butter in a food processor until mixture resembles fine bread crumbs. Add milk; pulse until dough comes together. Press mixture into ball, and then press into a 9-inch tart pan. Prick crust with fork. Freeze for half an hour; bake at 375°F for 15-20 minutes or until golden.



FILLING

2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 large onion, finely diced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

1 cup cranberries, fresh or frozen
 1 tablespoon sugar (optional)
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups Diamond Chopped or Sliced
 Walnuts, toasted (2-2.25 ounce packages)

2 teaspoons fresh thyme, minced
 2 eggs
 1 cup heavy cream
 2 to 3 ounces crumbled blue cheese

Heat oil in heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, sprinkle with salt and sauté 10 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently until onion is tender and caramelized. Add cranberries and sugar, cook until they pop. Stir in walnuts and thyme, set aside. In a bowl, combine eggs and cream, whisk until smooth. Spoon walnut-cranberry mixture into baked tart shell, crumble blue cheese over top, and pour egg and cream mixture over filling. Bake at 350°F until golden, and custard is set, about 15-20 minutes. Cool 15 minutes before serving. Serves 8. Great with a mixed green salad, tossed with a walnut oil vinaigrette.



READER SERVICE NO. 117



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Do you have any cool tricks, improved techniques, or ingenious ideas that make your cooking more efficient, enjoyable, or delicious? Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Key hanger holds measuring spoons

I've transformed a piece of hardware meant to hang keys into a handy place to hang measuring spoons and cups. I love having these items so accessible.

—Patricia Ryan Madson,
El Granada, CA

Salvaging overwhipped cream

When whipping cream to soft billowy peaks with an electric mixer, a few seconds of extra beating can take the cream into the stiff peak zone. There is a remedy to this, as long as you haven't gone so far as to beat the cream into butter. As soon as you notice that the cream looks overwhipped, stop the mixer. Pour in a bit more heavy cream and whisk by hand gently to incorporate it.

—Jennifer Johnson,
New London, CT

Doughnut hamburgers?

It's always a challenge to get hamburgers to cook evenly: by the time the center is done how I like it, the edges are overcooked.

I recently heard of an interesting solution from a chef on television. Shape the beef into a patty and then poke a small hole (about ½ inch) in the center so it looks like a doughnut. The whole patty cooks at the same rate this way, and during cooking, the hole shrinks to almost nothing.

—Ned Jenkins,
New York, NY



A key holder makes a decorative, handy place to hang measuring spoons, cups, and small tools.

Where to put a turkey while it's brining

When attempting to brine a turkey for Thanksgiving, I realized I had neither a container nor space in my refrigerator for such a large item. The answer? Put the turkey and brine in a large, clean trash bag and then set the bag inside a picnic cooler, along with some ice cubes or cold packs. If it's cold enough outside, you could also just put the cooler on a porch or fire escape or in the garage.

—Marjorie Hollway,
Colorado Springs, CO

Serrated spoon scrapes out squash seeds

Getting the seeds and stringy fibers out of a butternut squash goes a lot faster if you use a grapefruit spoon with the serrated tip.

—Kim Cronin, Eugene, OR

Splatter-free immersion blender

An immersion blender is a great tool for quickly blending a sauce or puréeing a soup, but it can also splatter food if

you're not careful. To avoid creating a mess, I slip a plastic bag over the bowl or pot. Then I make a slit in the bag that's large enough to wiggle in the blade end of the immersion blender. The power button stays above the bag. When I turn it on, the ingredients stay inside the pot and the bag acts as a kind of lid.

—Joan McRae,
Chesapeake, VA

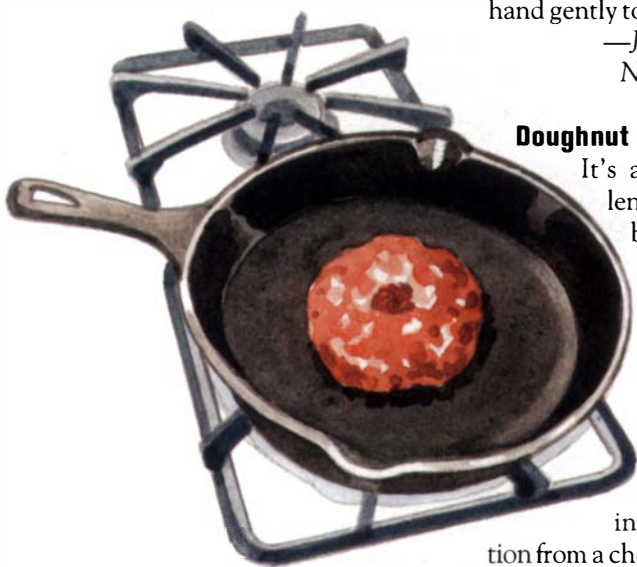
Electric knife slices through biscotti

When making biscotti, I slice the baked dough with an electric knife. The slices come out even, with no crumbling edges.

—Deborah Robichaud,
Gloucester, Ontario

A no-mess way to discard used oil

Like many people, I pour greasy pan drippings and used cooking oil into an empty soup or vegetable can. Once the fat cools, though, I put the can in a small plastic bag, seal it with a twist-tie, and store it in the door of my freezer. I add



For hamburgers that cook evenly, make a small hole in the center when forming the patty.

"Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was cooking, not even the mouse. The pot-racks were hung in the kitchen with care, with hopes that St. Calphalon soon would be there...When what to my wondering eyes should appear but a new set of cookware—thank you my dear!"

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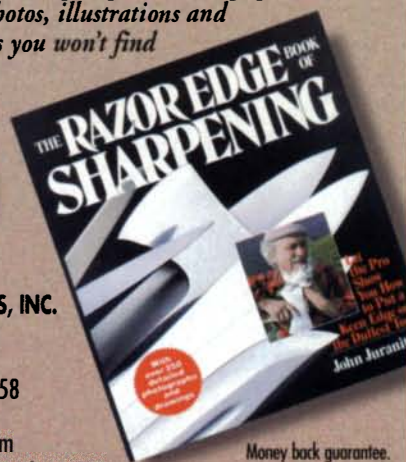


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TIPS

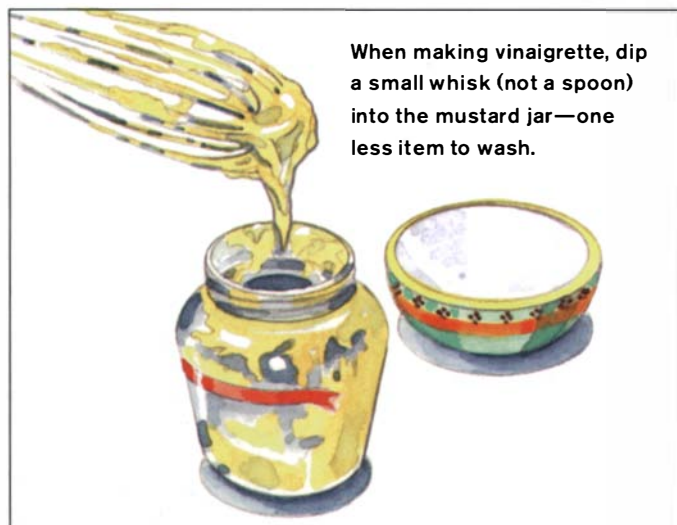
more used fat or drippings to the can until it's three-quarters full. Then on garbage day, I toss the can (still in the plastic bag) in with my regular garbage. It's a "no mess" way to handle a messy job.

—Helen de la Cerna,
Altadena, CA

Choose the right peeler for the job

I keep two types of peelers on hand: one with a swivel blade and another that doesn't swivel. I use the swivel peeler for vegetables with thin, delicate skins, such as carrots and asparagus. The fixed blade peeler is better for thicker-skinned eggplant, turnips, and apples. For vegetables like celeriac with coarse, craggy skins, I use a paring knife.

—Sophie Stepankiy,
Fairfield, CT



When making vinaigrette, dip a small whisk (not a spoon) into the mustard jar—one less item to wash.

Whisk up a bit of mustard

A small tip that keeps my dishwashing to a minimum: Instead of using a spoon to measure out mustard for my vinaigrettes, I use a small whisk. I dunk the whisk into the jar (if the mouth isn't wide enough, I use a fork),

catching 1 or 2 teaspoons of mustard on the tines. I put the whisk (or fork) in a small bowl or measuring cup, pour in vinegar by eye, and whisk to combine. Then I whisk in olive oil to taste.

—Eleanor Ricci,
West Palm Beach, FL

Pliers in the kitchen

I use pliers to remove skin from chicken, to pull off the tough membrane from a rack of ribs, or for any other job that requires a lot of grip. I wash the pliers in the dishwasher and keep it with my kitchen shears and other utensils.

—Ann Elder,
Fennville, MI

For a nonstick pan, use butter and oil

Here's a way to duplicate a nonstick surface on a regular "stick" baking pan. Rub the pan with butter, freeze the pan for a few minutes, and then coat the pan with vegetable oil. This double layer coating of fat works as well as any nonstick pan.

—Shirley Corriher,
Atlanta, GA ♦

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Make-Ahead Mini

Freeze-ahead assembly
guarantees perfectly cooked
beef filet and flaky—not
soggy—pastry

BY RIS LACOSTE



A pastry package with a surprise filling.
Serve each individual Wellington cut in half to show
off the spinach, blue cheese, and mushroom stuffing.

Beef Wellingtons

Last spring, when I set out to cook sixty individual beef Wellingtons for a wedding, I realized that this classic dish of beef in pastry is the ultimate example of how to meld a juicy filling with crisp, flaky pastry. If you think of how delicious classic pastry dishes like chicken pot pie, apple pie, and turnovers are, you realize just how important the balance of juices and pastry is. With all of these dishes, and especially beef Wellington, the trick is to avoid a soggy crust, but to also make sure that some of the tasty juices do blend with the flaky pastry.

With this in mind, I set up my goals for the perfect beef Wellington: first, to achieve a crisp, flaky pastry rather than a soggy one; second, to meld the juices and flavors of the filling with the pastry; third, to cook the beef to a perfect medium rare; and finally, to have time for a cocktail with my guests. This last goal—time—is a crucial factor for home cooks, especially around the holidays. As luck would have it, when I developed my recipe for individual Wellingtons at the restaurant, I discovered a terrific way to make them ahead that also produces superior results. These mini Wellingtons (each serves one person) are assembled days ahead and kept frozen; they go straight from the freezer to the oven. The post-freeze cooking time is about 55 minutes, but you don't have to do anything—you can even have *two* cocktails with your guests (or a nice leisurely first course).

A frozen Wellington cooks slowly to the perfect degree of doneness

Although I am not a proponent of frozen food in general, there are some dishes that do just fine when properly handled and packaged for freezing. This beef Wellington is a great example. The freezing technique achieves all the goals: I cook the frozen Wellingtons using high heat at first, which sets the pastry. Puff pastry must go from a very cold to a very hot environment for the “puff” to take place. (The puff comes from the steam released from melting butter.) After a short time, I lower the heat, which allows those juices to meld and crisps the pastry without overcoloring it. Meanwhile, the well-protected piece of beef in the center is happily coming just to temperature.

These terrific results start with good pastry. Traditionally, beef Wellington used to be wrapped in brioche, a rich, yeasty dough. But a more modern



Turn up the heat and sear beef filets for a nice crust but a still-red center—once wrapped in pastry and baked, they'll cook to medium rare.



Squeeze and squeeze again—until the spinach for your filling is as dry as it can be.

version uses puff pastry, which is a bit lighter. I am lucky enough to have the luxury of a brilliant pastry chef who makes gorgeous puff pastry. And you can, of course, make your own puff pastry, too (for a good recipe, see “A Shortcut to Flaky Puff Pastry,” *Fine Cooking* #23, or visit www.finecooking.com). But the great news is that this recipe works well with store-bought frozen puff pastry. *Fine Cooking* tested my recipe using frozen puff pastry, so the recipe below calls for it. The most important thing to remember when working with puff pastry is to keep it cold at all times, so that the butter doesn't melt before it goes into the oven.

It's also important to choose good beef and to sear it before it goes into the Wellington. To begin with, buy equal-sized 5- to 6-ounce portions of beef tenderloin. Ask your butcher to cut them from the center of the tenderloin (or buy a whole tenderloin and cut them yourself, reserving the rest for other uses). To prepare the filets for the Wellingtons, you'll sear them in a very hot frying pan. First, season them very generously (don't be afraid to rub in the salt and pepper) and be sure your pan is hot before you start cooking. Cook the filets in batches so that you don't overcrowd the pan. Searing over high heat can be a bit messy, with oil sizzling all around the kitchen,



Fillings at the ready. To assemble six "Wellies" quickly, portion all the filling ingredients ahead of time, including the blue cheese.

but it's worth it. The filets will get a rich brown crust (which adds flavor to the final product and also prevents too much juice from escaping into the pastry), and the center will still be rare (it will come up to medium rare in the oven).

I've chosen to be creative with the filling for my Wellingtons. A classic filling (really a layering over or under the beef) for beef Wellington is a mushroom duxelles or foie gras, or both. For my filling, I decided on a combination of bold and fresh flavors—I started with portabella mushrooms and added caramelized onions, Maytag blue cheese, and fresh spinach for color, flavor, and texture. You can prepare all of these ingredients a day ahead of time to make the task of assembling the Wellingtons even easier.

Though it isn't necessary, you can serve the Wellingtons with a sauce if you like. I like to make a fortified Cabernet sauce, because I think the high acid level helps to cut some richness and enhance the flavor of the beef and the cheese while balancing the sweetness of the onions. But this type of sauce is based on a veal reduction—much easier to make in a restaurant kitchen—and since the melting cheese and the beef juices tend to make their own sauce, you really don't need anything else. If you do want to make a wine sauce, I recommend the Sauce Périgueux in *The Joy of Cooking* (older editions), or you could consult any classic French cookbook.

Get organized and assembly will go smoothly

After making so many Wellingtons, I realized that planning ahead and getting organized was the real key. First, read the recipe through several times. Decide what you'll do ahead of time and how far in advance you'll start. Also, consider how many you'll want to make. The recipe makes six, but if you're planning for a big party, you can always make more since they freeze so well. For the best results, as-

semble and freeze the Wellingtons at least one day and up to seven days in advance.

On the day of assembly, have your *mise en place* ready. This is one time when having everything in its place really makes a difference. When you take a round of puff pastry out of the freezer, you'll want to move relatively quickly to assemble the package so that the pastry doesn't get too warm. So have all your ingredients—beef, onions, spinach, cheese, and mushrooms—divided into portions and arranged around your work area. Be sure that all your ingredients (not just the pastry) are well chilled. Once you start assembling, don't fret too much about what the packages look like; each one will look better than the last, and they'll all look gorgeous when they're baked. You're going to love them, and so will your guests.

RECIPE

Individual Beef Wellingtons with Mushroom, Spinach & Blue Cheese Filling

Prepare the components of the Wellingtons the day before or the morning before you intend to assemble them. Once assembled, freeze them for at least six to eight hours (ideally overnight) and up to a week. Make sure you have plenty of room in your freezer before starting. *Serves six.*

FOR THE PASTRY:

3 packages (1 lb. each) frozen puff pastry (6 sheets total), such as Pepperidge Farm brand
Flour for rolling

FOR THE MUSHROOMS:

2 large portabella mushrooms, stems removed
6 Tbs. olive oil; more for cooking
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp. fresh thyme leaves, lightly chopped
½ tsp. very roughly chopped fresh rosemary
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

wine choices



For beef Wellington, choose a full-bodied red

This modern update of a culinary classic calls for a big red wine to balance the earthy filet and rich blue cheese tucked inside the puff pastry.

From France, try Jaboulet's 1997 Crozes-Hermitage (\$15); it's 100-percent Syrah. The forward black fruit, peppery-spice flavors, and long finish are ideal for beef Wellington.

The earthy, heady aromas of flowers, leaves, and wild mushrooms in Chianti Classico Riserva suit beef Wellington, too. Try the intense 1990 Chianti Classico Riserva from Badia a Coltibuono (\$36) or the 1990 Ducale d'Oro from Ruffino (\$30).

Spain's Gran Reserva Rioja wines are among the

most elegant in the world—and they're great buys. Try the 1991 Conde de Valdemar from Martinez Bujanda (\$25) or the 1990 Cune Imperial (\$35). Both have luscious, mature fruit flavors balanced by oak and a silky finish.

If you feel like splurging on a great Cabernet Sauvignon, serve the 1996 Rubicon from

Niebaum-Coppola (\$95) in the Napa Valley. The wine is powerful at first sip but follows the contours of the food with velvety, dark, fruit flavors and balanced tannins.

Steven Kolpan is a professor of wine studies at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.



Prepare the pastry. Roll out a sheet of frozen puff pastry and trace a 10-inch cake pan to make a round.

FOR THE ONIONS:

4 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 medium onions (about 6 oz. each), thinly sliced
½ cup medium-dry sherry (I prefer Amontillado)
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SPINACH AND CHEESE:

12 cups tightly packed spinach (about 14 oz.)
Pinch ground white pepper (optional)
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
6 oz. Maytag blue cheese (or other good-quality blue, such as Roquefort)

FOR THE FILETS:

6 portions beef tenderloin, 5 to 6 oz. each (choose equal-size center-cut portions)
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
About ¼ cup olive oil; more as needed

FOR ASSEMBLY:

2 eggs, whisked together lightly with 1 tsp. water
Flour

TO COOK THE WELLINGTONS:

2 eggs, whisked together lightly with 1 tsp. water

PREPARE THE PASTRY AND FILLINGS:

Roll and cut the pastry—Roll out each of the six pastry sheets to about ⅜-16-inch thick and, using a sharp knife, cut out a 10-inch round from each. From the scraps, cut out 12 leaves or other shapes to use as decoration. Layer the pastry rounds (and the decorations) between pieces of waxed paper or parchment, wrap the bundle well in plastic, and freeze again.

Cook the mushrooms—In a shallow bowl, toss the portabellas with the oil, garlic, thyme, and rosemary; cover and marinate in the refrigerator for 2 hours. Remove the portabellas from the marinade (they will have soaked up most of it) and season with salt and pepper. Heat a heavy skillet over medium-high heat, add a thin film of oil, and sear the portabellas on both sides until they've softened and browned, about 5 min. per side. Transfer them to paper towels and turn them once to drain both sides. When cool, cut them in half and cut the halves into strips about ½ inch thick.

Caramelize the onions—Melt the butter in a heavy sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onions, reduce the heat to medium low, and cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until well browned, soft, and sweet, 30 to 40 min. Add the sherry and cook until the pan is dry. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside to cool. Put the cooled onions in a colander set in a bowl; cover and refrigerate.

Prepare the spinach and cheese—Wash the spinach well and remove any stems. Prepare an ice-water bath. Put half of the spinach in a large sauté pan with a touch of water, 1 Tbs. of the butter, a pinch of



Create a cross. Cut a cross shape out of the pastry round (see text on p. 42). Save the scraps to cut out decorations.



Stack 'em up. Layer spinach, blue cheese, onions, a filet, mushrooms, and more spinach in the center of the pastry.

salt, and a little ground white pepper if you like. Toss over medium-high heat, just until wilted and immediately put it in the water bath to shock the color and stop the cooking. Scoop it from the ice water and put it in a colander to drain. Squeeze the spinach, a small handful at a time, as much as you can and set it aside on paper towels to continue draining. Repeat with the remaining spinach. Cover with plastic and refrigerate. Divide the blue cheese into six 1-oz. portions. Try slicing the whole piece into six slices; if it crumbles, just evenly divide the cheese. Cover and refrigerate.

Sear the filets—Season each portion of meat very generously on both sides with salt and pepper. Rub



Seal with an egg wash. Fold the longer sides up first and then the ends. Seal it up by smoothing and pinching where the panels meet.

Freeze as you go. Pop each Wellie onto a baking sheet in the freezer as soon as it's assembled.



the seasoning into the meat to keep it in place. Pour $\frac{1}{8}$ inch olive oil into a heavy sauté pan and heat it until just smoking. Sear the filets over high heat for 2 min. on each side until brown and crisp on the outside. Be sure your pan is very hot so that you just sear the meat and don't overcook it, and don't crowd the pan or the meat will steam rather than sear. (Check the sides to be sure the filets are still red in the middle.) Work in batches if necessary. Refrigerate the meat until chilled or until ready to use, up to 24 hours.

ASSEMBLE THE WELLINGTONS:

Arrange the mushrooms, onions, spinach, cheese, and filets on your counter. Divide the portabella strips into six portions. Make sure the caramelized onions are well drained (they tend to collect liquid as they sit) and divide them into six portions. Squeeze the spinach again, divide it into six portions, and leave it on paper towels for any further draining. Cover a large rimmed

baking sheet (that fits in your freezer) with kitchen parchment. Have a ruler, a small sharp knife, a pastry brush, and the egg wash on hand. Lightly flour one area of your counter (the cooler the area the better).

Pull a pastry round (and two decorative pieces) from the freezer and set it on the floured surface. Work quickly to maintain the integrity of the pastry. Lightly score a 4x3-inch rectangle in the center of the round; don't cut through the pastry. Extend the lines of the rectangle and cut out the corners of the round created by the line extensions (see the photo on p. 41), leaving a cross of pastry with a 4x3-inch center.

Give a spinach portion one last squeeze and spread half of it over the rectangle of pastry. Follow with a portion of blue cheese, a portion of onions, a filet, a portion of portabellas in one layer, and the rest of the spinach portion. Spread each layer as evenly as possible. Brush a light coating of the egg wash on each of the four panels of dough.

Check to be sure that the pastry is now pliable enough to fold without breaking (wait a minute or two if necessary). Fold each side panel onto the top, stretching the dough a bit if necessary to make the ends meet, or slightly overlapping if necessary. Follow suit with the top and bottom panels. Seal the panels together by pressing in the top panel where it meets the bottom panel and by pinching each of the four sides together where the panels meet. Don't worry if the package doesn't look gorgeous; it's more important that it's well sealed so the juices don't leak out.

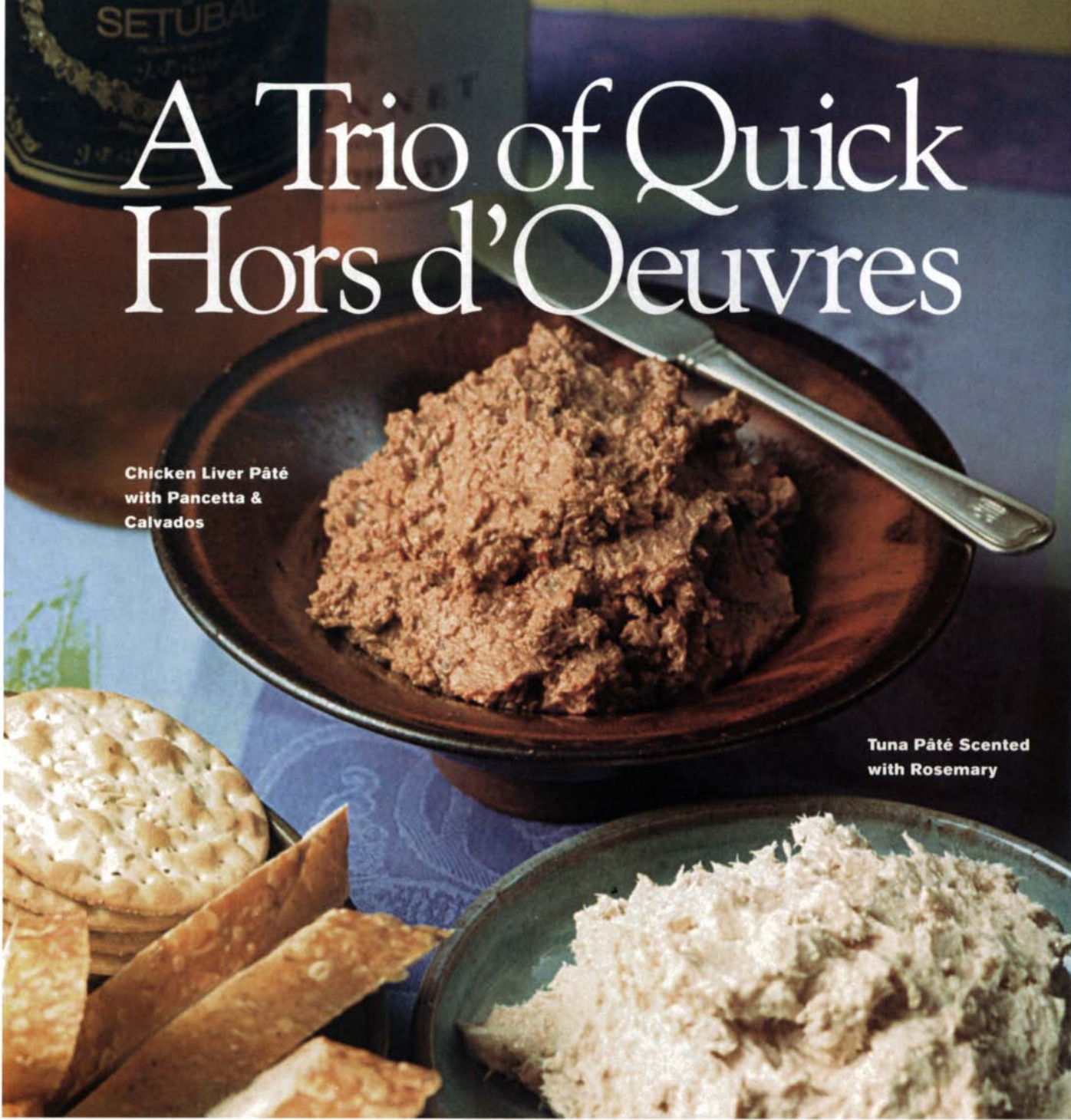
Hold the package upright in your hands, securing all the seals and smoothing the rough spots to make the package into a neat, rounded block. Set it seam side down and gently press the top and sides to make them as even all the way around as possible. Brush the top and all sides with egg wash. Put the decorations on top and brush with egg wash. (You'll be cutting the package in half, so separate the decorations.) Set the Wellington on the parchment-lined baking sheet. Put the pan in the freezer to set and chill the pastry. Repeat with the 5 remaining Wellingtons, adding each to the pan in the freezer as you go. After they chill for an hour, wrap them well in plastic individually and return them to the freezer.

COOK THE WELLINGTONS:

Heat the oven to 400°F. Make another egg wash. Remove the Wellingtons from the freezer (do not thaw) and brush them with a fresh coat of egg wash. Put them on a lightly greased rimmed heavy baking sheet and cook for 20 min. Reduce the heat to 350°F and cook until the internal temperature is 110°F (be sure the tip of the thermometer is inserted in the center of the package), another 35 to 40 min. Set them aside to rest for no longer than 10 min. The tightly enclosed beef will continue to cook out of the oven, so if you have to wait for more than 10 min., trim the sides of the pastry to let out some of the hot steam and reduce the internal temperature. Cut each Wellington in half, arrange on warm plates, and serve immediately.

Ris Lacoste is the award-winning executive chef of 1789 Restaurant in Washington, D.C. ♦

A Trio of Quick Hors d'Oeuvres



Chicken Liver Pâté
with Pancetta &
Calvados

Tuna Pâté Scented
with Rosemary

These spreads have all the deep flavor and richness of traditional pâtés with none of the hassle—and no pork fat

BY LISA HANAUER

I'm quite a fan of the unctuous texture and rich flavor of pork fat, but in all my years of cooking, I've rarely bothered to make traditional pâtés or terrines. Instead, I've devised a collection of less labor-intensive but equally compelling "charcuterie" recipes...spreads, really, that make fabulous hors d'oeuvres when paired with slices of crusty baguette or hearty crackers.

One of the three that I'm presenting here is fairly traditional, based on sautéed chicken livers and spiked with pancetta, Calvados, and fresh thyme. The other two use fish—smoked trout and fresh tuna—so they feel lighter, though butter and *crème*



Be gentle with your final folding to avoid bruising the chopped chives and to keep the flaky-chunky texture of the smoked trout.



Deceptively simple with only three ingredients, Smoked Trout Rillettes have a complex and delicious flavor and a pleasing chunky texture.

fraîche still play a big role. The trout gets a fresh lift from a handful of freshly chopped chives, and the tuna is paired with fragrant rosemary and lemon.

The methods couldn't be simpler, though for the chicken liver and tuna spreads, you must be vigilant about not overcooking them. After cooking and cooling the ingredients, I toss everything into the food processor for a few seconds. The final textures of these two spreads should be, well, spreadable, though not satiny smooth. The texture of the trout spread is more "shreddy," much like real rillettes (pronounced rih-YEHT), which are usually made from shredded confit of pork or goose.

While these spreads are extremely quick to make, you do need to allow some time for them to chill, which creates a better texture and lets flavors marry.

I usually pack the spreads into an attractive bowl or ramekin, put them on the table with croutons and crackers, and then let my guests help themselves. While it's true that the following recipes won't produce true pâtés or rillettes, I find that my guests (and I) are always happy to spread the product of my culinary license on a crouton and savor the difference.

RECIPES

Smoked Trout Rillettes

These slightly smoky, velvety rillettes are as good tucked into an omelette as they are on freshly made croutons. But be advised, even so-called boneless smoked trout may harbor small bones, so keep a sharp eye as you mix. *Serves six to eight.*

2 boneless smoked trout, skin discarded (to yield about 8 oz.) (for Sources, see p. 80)

5 to 7 Tbs. *crème fraîche* (depending on how moist the trout is and on your personal taste)

3 Tbs. chopped fresh chives

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Remove any bones from the trout and break it up into small pieces. Add the *crème fraîche* and mix with a fork, taking care to shred rather than mash the trout. Fold in the chives and a generous amount of ground pepper. Serve with freshly made croutons or toasts.

Chicken Liver Pâté with Pancetta & Calvados

This quick and luscious pâté can easily be made in a smaller quantity with just the livers found inside of one chicken. Rabbit or duck liver works equally well, and another brandy or a good balsamic vinegar can substitute for the Calvados. *Serves six to eight.*

8 oz. fresh chicken livers

2 tsp. olive oil

Salt

3 oz. pancetta, cut into ¼-inch dice

1 shallot, diced

¼ tsp. finely chopped fresh thyme

¼ cup Calvados (apple brandy)

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature

Freshly ground pepper to taste

Rinse the livers and trim off the tough tissue that connects the two lobes; pat dry. In a nonstick sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat and add the chicken livers, seasoning with a small amount of salt. Cook the livers, turning, to medium rare (they'll continue to cook as they cool), lightly browning on all sides, about 4 min. Set the livers aside and add the pancetta, shallots, and thyme to the pan. Gently sauté over medium heat until the pancetta is slightly colored and the shallots are softened. Add the Calvados and deglaze the pan, scraping with a wooden spoon and cooking until the Calvados is reduced to about 1 Tbs.; set aside to cool slightly. Put the cooled livers, pancetta-shallot mixture, and butter in a food processor and process until well blended. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Put the spread into a ramekin or small bowl, lightly covering the top with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until set. Grind more pepper over the top before serving with croutons or crackers.

Fresh Tuna Pâté Scented with Rosemary

I could eat this tuna butter spread thickly on my morning toast, but most people will prefer it with a glass of white wine as an aperitif. Be very careful not to overcook the tuna as it will make a dry pâté. This is also good with green peppercorns folded in at the end. *Serves six to eight.*

6 large sprigs fresh rosemary

2 tsp. olive oil

8 oz. very fresh tuna

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Arrange the rosemary in an even layer in a nonstick skillet, add the oil, and heat over medium until the herbs are fragrant. Place the tuna on the rosemary branches and cook until the cooked white of the flesh has traveled about one-third of the way up the side of the tuna steak, about 5 min. Turn the tuna over and cook until cooked but still quite pink inside, another



Go slow when cooking the tuna, so the texture stays supple and the rosemary perfumes the meat.



Give chicken livers a potent dose of flavoring with pancetta, shallot, thyme, and a deglazing of Calvados or other brandy...

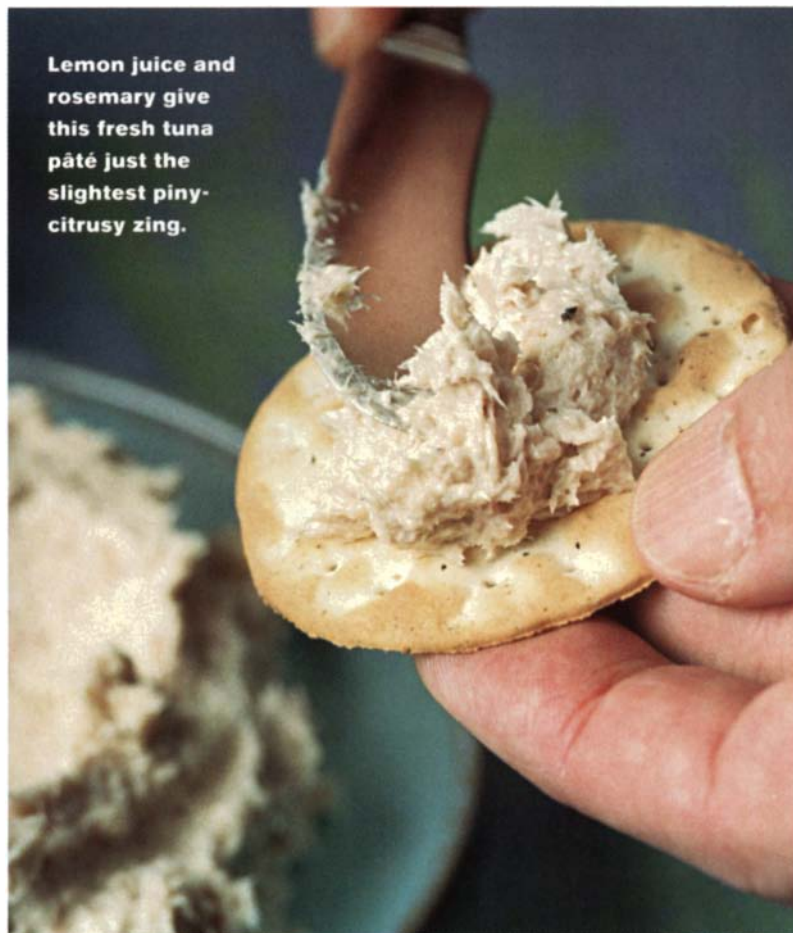
5 min. (The tuna will continue to cook as it cools.) Remove the tuna from the pan and allow it to cool (pull off any clinging herbs).

In a food processor, combine the cooled tuna, the butter, lemon juice, salt, and pepper and process until smooth. Put the spread into a ramekin or small bowl, lightly cover the top with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until set. Grind more pepper over the top before serving with croutons or crackers.

Lisa Hanauer is a former chef-restaurateur who now writes about food and teaches preschool. She lives in Oakland, California. ♦



...and spread the rich, savory result on a crouton or cracker.



Lemon juice and rosemary give this fresh tuna pâté just the slightest piny-citrusy zing.

Winter Blues? Turn to Hearty Greens

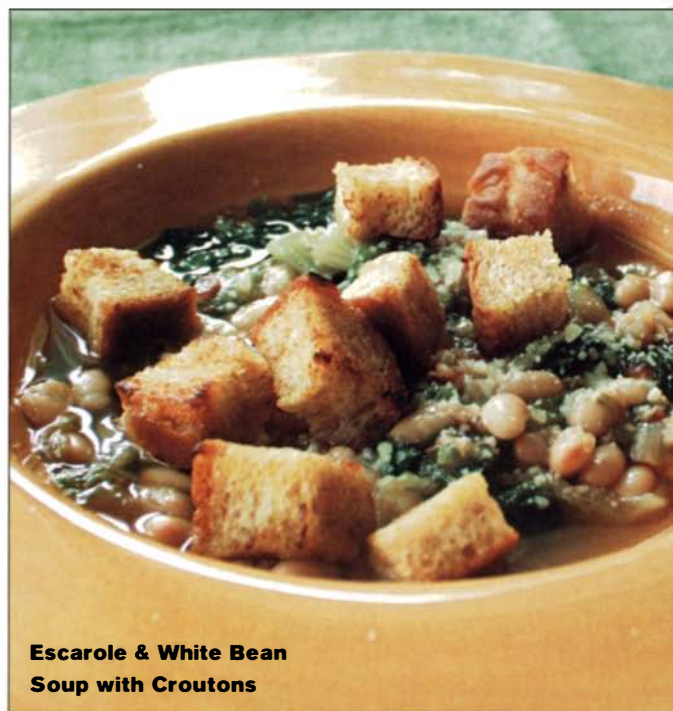
Learn to manage the tender or tough personalities of delicious leafy greens like kale, spinach, and Swiss chard

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON

Every time I walk through the produce section of the grocery store, the wavy plumes of leafy green vegetables beckon to me, begging to be bought. Invariably, I wind up in a wrestling match with those too-small plastic produce bags, because I can't resist picking up an extra-large bunch of crisp, curly kale, a frilly thatch of mustard greens, or a clasp of the new



Susie Middleton can't resist a bunch of fresh greens.



Escarole & White Bean Soup with Croutons



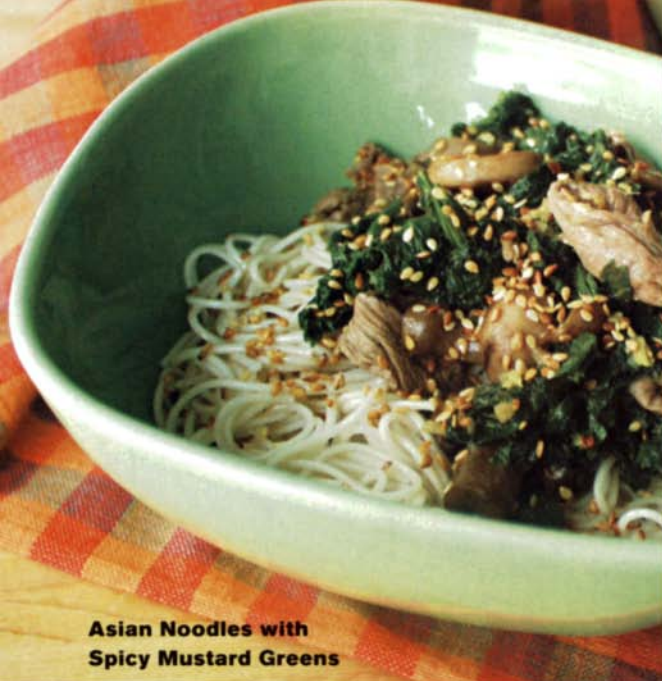
Garlicky Braised Kale with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

electric-hued “Bright Lights” Swiss chard. The truth is, these greens not only look beautiful, but they're also incredibly satisfying to cook with (and, yes, really good for you, too: they're high in vitamins A and C, as well as folic acid and calcium).

“Wilt” tender greens; braise heartier ones

I used to get home and wonder what in the world I was going to do with all those greens, but not any more. Working away in my warm kitchen on chilly days, I've developed a little repertoire of recipes (side dishes, soups, and light suppers) for cooking these cool-weather greens. In the process, I've discovered that greens have different personalities. Some—like beet greens, Swiss chard, and spinach—are so tender that they need only a touch of heat to be cooked. Overcooking them, in fact, tends to alter their flavors

Photos: Steve Hunter



**Asian Noodles with
Spicy Mustard Greens**

some greens (like spinach) will give off a lot of moisture when wilted, and you'll need to drain them in a colander before proceeding with your recipe so that water doesn't dilute your finished dish. For the simplest dishes (like Wilted Tender Greens with Orange & Ginger, on p. 50), I take the drained, wilted greens and add them back to the skillet, where, in the meantime, I've sautéed a few flavorful tidbits in a little oil or butter. Tossed together, the result is delicious. Wilted greens are also a handy base for baked gratins, pasta fillings, or quiches and tarts.

To braise heartier greens, wilt them first in a little fat and finish cooking in liquid. To start the process, sauté aromatics like garlic and ginger or onions and pancetta in a little oil or butter. Add your greens and stir until they're all wilted; then add just

in an unpleasant way. While these greens are best "wilted," the heartier greens, like kale, mustard, collards, and turnip greens, will be tough and leathery unless patiently simmered. The assertive flavors of these greens also mellow with cooking and blend with the aromatics with which they're cooked.

There are a few cooking greens that can be wilted or braised. You might think of escarole or dandelion greens as hearty lettuces best suited for warm salads, but both of these greens (especially older, larger leaves) are delicious braised or added to soups, though cooking them too long, unlike the very hearty greens, will not improve their flavor.

To "wilt" tender greens, pile them in a skillet (preferably nonstick), turn the heat on, and toss the greens with tongs until they're all collapsed and moistened. If your greens are very dry at the start, you'll need to add a tablespoon or so of water to your pan, but usually the little bit of moisture left clinging to the leaves after washing is enough. Even then,



**Creamy
Parmesan
Swiss Chard Gratin**



**Wilted Tender Greens
with Orange & Ginger**

enough liquid (like chicken or vegetable stock) to cover the greens. Simmer the greens, covered, until you like the texture. Depending on the age of the greens and your taste, this could be anywhere from 8 minutes to half an hour (or more if you're cooking with tough, older greens). After braising, you can uncover and boil off the remaining liquid if you want to serve the greens alone, as a side dish (see Garlicky Braised Kale on p. 49). Or you can add cooked pasta, rice, potatoes, beans, or meat to the liquid for a full meal (I add sliced beef to Spicy Mustard Greens with Asian Noodles, p. 50).

Greens love bold flavors, so don't hold back

The flavors of cool-weather greens range from intensely earthy, with almost a mineral-like taste (beet greens, Swiss chard, spinach) to mildly cabbagey



Separate—but don't discard—chard stems from the leaves by running a sharp knife along both sides of the stem.

(kale and collards) to slightly bitter and spicy (mustard greens, dandelion greens). The one thing they all have in common is a perfect marriage with assertive flavors, which seem to mellow their earthiness and enhance their robustness. Try to include at least one or two of the following types of ingredients when preparing greens:

- ◆ **Something smoky or meaty:** pancetta, bacon, chorizo, kielbasa, any cured meat.
- ◆ **Sweetly pungent aromatics:** garlic, onions, fresh ginger (be generous with amounts).
- ◆ **An acid or anything spicy:** vinegar, lemon juice, hot sauce, red pepper flakes, chile or curry paste, minced hot peppers.
- ◆ **Anything creamy (and fatty):** heavy cream, sour cream, goat cheese.

This last category—cream—has an especially magical effect on the slightly rough flavors of some greens, smoothing them out with delicious results. In fact, the Creamy Parmesan Swiss Chard Gratin at right is an excellent way to introduce greens to people who think they may not like them.

Clean greens before storing and you'll use them sooner

Before you start cooking, though, you have to come to terms with cleaning and storing your greens. While it's tempting to cram the greens into some remote corner of the refrigerator when you get home, you'll be really glad if you take the time to clean them first. While greens tend to last longer unwashed, you're ten times more likely to use the greens before they go bad if you make them recipe-ready before storing them. And as long as you store your greens properly, they'll last anywhere from one to three days in the refrigerator; some of the heartier ones, like kale and collards, can last four to five days. If you choose the freshest, most unblemished greens you can find at the market (or out of the garden), you'll find they last longer at home. For the best way to clean and store greens, see the sidebar at far right.

Creamy Parmesan Swiss Chard Gratin

I like the new variety of Swiss chard called "Bright Lights," which has yellow and pink stalks, but any Swiss chard will work fine. The chard leaves just need wilting for this gratin, but be sure to sauté the stems until lightly browned; this softens their flavor. *Serves four to six as a side dish.*

- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for coating the gratin pan**
- ½ cup toasted or stale coarse breadcrumbs**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- 2 cloves garlic, smashed and peeled**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ tsp. coarse salt**



Sauté sliced chard stems first until tender; then add the leaves and wilt them.

- 3 strips bacon (about 2½ oz.)**
- 1 lb. (about 1 bunch) Swiss chard, washed and drained, stems removed (see the photo above left) and cut crosswise into ¼-inch slices, leaves cut into ½-inch wide ribbons (to yield about 2¾ cups stems and 7 to 8 cups leaves)**
- ⅓ cup grated parmigiano reggiano**

Heat the oven to 400°F. Butter a shallow 5- or 6-cup ceramic gratin dish. Melt 1 Tbs. of the butter and toss it with the breadcrumbs; set aside.

In a medium saucepan, bring the cream and garlic to a boil (watch that it doesn't boil over), immediately lower the heat, and simmer vigorously for 5 min.; the cream should be reduced to about ¾ cup. Take the pan off the heat and remove the garlic cloves with a slotted spoon. Let the cream cool slightly, stirring occasionally to loosen. Season it with a few grinds of fresh pepper and ¼ tsp. of the salt.

Meanwhile, in a large (12-inch) nonstick skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp and browned. With tongs, transfer it to paper towels; crumble when cool. Leave the bacon fat in pan (if there's more than 2 Tbs., drain a little off). Add the remaining 1 Tbs. butter to the skillet and let it melt. Add

the chard stems and sauté them over medium to medium-high heat until they're somewhat softened and browned on the edges, about 10 min. Reduce the heat to medium, add the chard leaves and toss them with the contents of the skillet. Season them with the remaining ¼ tsp. salt. (You can add the leaves in two batches for easier handling.) Sauté until all the leaves are wilted, about 2 min. Use tongs to transfer the contents of the pan to the gratin dish (leave behind any excess liquid in the sauté pan), spreading them evenly.

Sprinkle the crumbled bacon and then the cheese over the chard. Pour the seasoned cream over all and top with the buttered breadcrumbs. Bake for 25 min.; the gratin will be brown and bubbly. Let rest for 10 to 15 min. before serving.

Escarole & White Bean "Soup" with Rustic Croutons

This is my variation on a classic Italian soup that traditionally has more escarole and beans than broth. Escarole is one of the easiest greens to prepare since you don't need to stem it; just slice the whole head across into ribbons before washing. *Serves four.*

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium onion (6 oz.), diced**
- 2 oz. very thinly sliced pancetta, diced (about ½ cup)**
- 1 Tbs. minced garlic**
- 1 medium to large head escarole (about 14 oz.), trimmed of outer leaves, 2 inches of root end cut off, leaves sliced across into ¾-inch wide strips (to yield about 9 to 10 cups), thoroughly washed**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 cups low-salt chicken stock (canned is fine, but don't use low-fat varieties, which I find have an off flavor)**
- 1 cup cooked small white beans (I use canned—Goya brand—drained)**
- 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- ¼ cup grated *parmigiano reggiano***
- 2 cups Rustic Croutons (see below)**

Heat the olive oil in a 4-qt. low-sided soup pot or Dutch oven over medium to medium-high heat. Add the onion and pancetta and sauté until the onion is softened and both are browned, about 12 min. Add the garlic, stir, and sauté until fragrant, 30 seconds to 1 min. Add the escarole and stir thoroughly to coat the leaves (and to deglaze the pan slightly with their moisture). Season with ½ tsp. of the salt and a few grinds of fresh pepper. Add the stock, stir well, and bring to a boil; cover the pot, lower to a simmer, and cook 8 to 10 min. Uncover the pot, add the beans, and simmer another 2 to 3 min. Add the lemon juice and turn off the heat. Ladle the soup into four shallow soup bowls and top each with 1 Tbs. of the cheese and a quarter of the croutons.

RUSTIC CROUTONS

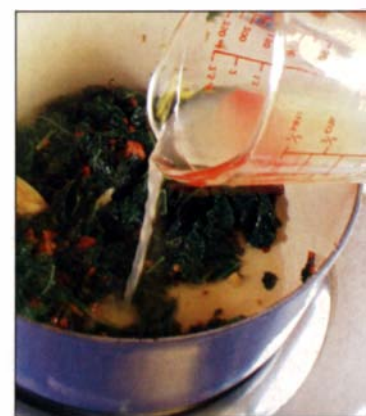
Heat 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil in a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add 2 cups (lightly packed) ¾-inch cubes of bread, cut from a good, airy, crusty loaf like ciabatta. Stir to coat the cubes with the oil, season with salt, and sauté, stirring constantly, until crisp and browned on most sides, 2 to 4 min.

Garlicky Braised Kale with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Braising softens kale, which will be a little tough and leathery if undercooked. Unfortunately, kale also loses its bright green color when properly cooked. As a variation, try using the pretty new variety of kale called *cavolo nero*, or Tuscan kale, in this recipe. Or use young turnip greens. You can also vary this recipe by sautéing onions or bacon with the garlic, or by adding red pepper flakes. *Serves two as a side dish.*

- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 5 cloves garlic, cut in half, smashed, and peeled**
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, well drained**
- 7 oz. stemmed kale leaves (from about ½ large bunch kale), washed and cut into 1-inch ribbons**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup low-salt chicken stock (canned is fine, but don't use low-fat)**
- ½ tsp. balsamic vinegar**
- ½ oz. crumbled goat cheese (optional)**

Heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven or a 3- to 4-qt. soup pot over medium heat. Add the garlic and sauté, stirring, until starting to brown, 2 to 3 min. Add the sun-dried tomatoes and stir to combine. Add the kale, tossing to coat it well with the oil. Season with the salt and a few grinds of pepper, and continue stirring until all the kale is wilted. Add the stock, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover and cook until the kale has softened, about 8 min. Uncover, turn the heat to high, and boil away the remaining liquid, stirring frequently, until the pan is almost dry. Take the pan off the heat. Season with the vinegar and stir to combine. Transfer to a small serving dish or plates. Top with the crumbled goat cheese, if you like.



Add a little chicken stock to wilted kale flavored with garlic and sun-dried tomatoes. Then cover and braise until tender.

How to clean and store leafy greens

When you get your greens home, remove any wires or rubber bands from the bunch and discard any yellowed or slimy leaves; trim away tough stem ends. You can also remove tough stems at this point with scissors, a sharp knife, (see the photo at far left), or your hands (see the photo on p. 50), or you can leave the stems on and remove them before cooking. If you remove chard stems, reserve them for cooking.

Fill a large bowl or the sink with cool water and swish the greens around in it. Lift out the greens and empty the silty water from the bowl or sink. Repeat

this one or two more times, depending on how dirty the greens are. Let the greens drip-dry on dishtowels and then spin them in a salad spinner (in batches if necessary).

Line the largest zip-top bags you can find (I recently bought jumbo ones for just this purpose) with paper towels. Lay the greens in the bags between the paper towels, close the bag tightly, and refrigerate. The paper towels help absorb excess water to prevent rot, while the sealed bag keeps the greens just moist and crisp enough so they don't dry out and go limp.

To stem tender greens like beets or spinach, simply grab both sides of the leaf and gently pull the stem up and out.



Wilted Tender Greens with Orange & Ginger

Many people don't realize how delicious beet greens are; I encourage you to try them in this recipe. Spinach prepared this way is also delicious. When shopping for beets and beet greens, choose bunches with small beets (the leaves will be more tender) and those that have the freshest, least damaged leaves. For an idea on what to do with the beets, see the sidebar below. *Serves two as a side dish.*



Use only the moisture clinging to the leaves after washing to help wilt tender greens. Toss them with tongs over the heat until they're all collapsed.

Spicy Mustard Greens with Asian Noodles

The spicy-sweet heat of fresh ginger combines with the peppery bite of mustard greens to make a very warming dish. If you can't find somen noodles, use another type of Asian noodle or angel hair pasta. You can also omit the beef from this recipe, if you like. *Serves four.*

Salt

- 4 oz. somen noodles
- 2 tsp. peanut oil
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 6 oz. cremini mushrooms, thickly sliced
- 3 Tbs. minced fresh ginger, divided
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp. dried red pepper flakes
- 2 cups low-salt chicken stock (canned is fine, but don't use low-fat)
- 8 oz. stemmed mustard greens, coarsely chopped (to yield about 8 cups), thoroughly washed
- 6 oz. marbled beef (such as a small sirloin, rib-eye, or skirt steak), very thinly sliced and tossed in 1 tsp. peanut oil
- 2 Tbs. soy sauce
- 2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
- 2 Tbs. toasted sesame seeds

In a 4-qt. low-sided soup pot or Dutch oven, bring 2 qt. water to a boil. Add ½ Tbs. salt and the somen noodles. Cook just 3 min., and then drain in a colander and rinse under cold water until cool. Drain well and toss with 2 tsp. peanut oil in a medium bowl. Set aside. These can sit for 30 min.

In the same pot (or another similar one), heat the vegetable oil over medium heat and sauté the mushrooms until softened and beginning to brown, 4 to 6 min. Add half of the ginger, the garlic, the red pepper flakes, and a little of the stock, stirring constantly to scrape up browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the rest of the stock and the mustard greens. Bring to a boil, stirring to wilt the greens, and cover. Reduce the heat and simmer about 8 min. (Check the texture of the greens. They shouldn't be tough, but they can still have a little toothiness.) Uncover, shut off the heat, and add the thinly sliced beef, soy sauce, vinegar, and the remaining ginger.

Using tongs, portion the noodles into shallow serving bowls, putting them to one side. Use tongs to portion some of the greens and beef into each bowl next to the noodles. Spoon some broth over all and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

Roast beets for the best flavor

I find that roasted beets have a delicious caramelized flavor and meaty texture that makes them more appealing to many people than boiled beets. To roast beets, scrub them clean (don't peel) and trim the ends. Quarter small beets and cut larger ones into 1-inch pieces. Toss the pieces to coat with olive oil and coarse salt. Line a baking pan with foil, spread the beets in the pan in one loose layer, and cover tightly with foil. Roast at 400°F until tender all the way through and a bit crispy on the bottom, 1½ to 2 hours.

Leaves from 2 bunches small beets, stemmed (to yield 9 to 10 oz. of greens) or 10 oz. spinach leaves, washed and partly dried (damp with just a bit of moisture clinging to them)

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
- ⅓ cup orange juice
- ½ tsp. coarse salt

In a large (12-inch) nonstick skillet, pile the beet greens and turn the heat to high. Using tongs, gently and continuously toss the greens over the heat until they're all wilted (they'll turn a darker green), 2 to 3 min. Don't overcook; they should collapse but still have some body. Transfer them to a colander and let any excess liquid drip away. Wipe the skillet clean if necessary.

In the same skillet, heat the butter and oil over medium-low heat. When the butter is melted, add the garlic and ginger and sauté until softened and fragrant, about 2 min. Add the orange juice, turn the heat to high, and reduce the liquid to a glazy consistency, no more than 1 min.; you'll have 1½ to 2 Tbs. left in the pan. Turn the heat down to low, immediately add the drained beet greens and the salt, and toss thoroughly to coat. Remove the pan from the heat. Serve hot from the pan or slightly cooled.

Susie Middleton, the managing editor of Fine Cooking, wanders the produce aisles in Norwalk, Connecticut. ♦

Simply Delicious Roasted Potatoes

Crisp outside, creamy inside,
roasted potatoes are the foolproof
side dish—as long as you give
them room in the pan

BY MOLLY STEVENS

When it comes to choosing side dishes for our big holiday gatherings, there's one dish that we can never be without—roasted potatoes. No matter how many other dishes there are on the menu or how fussy our guests are, I can count on the fact that everyone loves potatoes, especially when they're roasted up to be creamy and tender inside and crisp and crunchy on the outside. The other reason I love roasted potatoes is that they're entirely simple and foolproof, provided you keep a few basics in mind.

Low-starch potatoes are the best choice

Since low-starch (also called waxy) potatoes have a higher moisture content than baking potatoes, they tend to stay creamier and softer inside when roasted. I reserve high-starch baking potatoes for just that—baking whole in their jackets—and use low-starch or all-purpose potatoes for roasting. The most common varieties of these types that you'll find in the supermarket are small Red Bliss, Yukon Gold, Yellow Finn, and California white (sometimes called long whites). In the fall and early winter, many markets carry some of the more interesting (and more

**Salt, pepper, and
a little thyme
are all you need
to season crisp-
creamy Classic
Roasted Potatoes.**



The mustard mix will look gloppy at first, but keep tossing until the potatoes are evenly coated.



flavorful) specialty potatoes, such as creamer potatoes, fingerlings, all-blue, or other heirloom varieties that are also excellent for roasting.

Peel if the skins are thick, but don't bother blanching

Figure $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of potatoes per person, depending on what else you're serving. I tend to err on the side of too many: leftover roasted potatoes are wonderful heated up for breakfast or served cold in salads.

Since most lower-starch potatoes have thin skins, they don't need to be peeled before roasting. Just scrub them with a vegetable brush and dry them thoroughly—wet skins will interfere with browning.

Round, bite-size creamer potatoes or the wobbly, oblong fingerlings can be roasted whole, while larger potatoes need to be cut up into chunks or wedges. Anything smaller than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch will cook too quickly and dry out, and anything over 2 inches doesn't leave enough cut surfaces to give you the perfect ratio of crunchy crust to soft interior that you're looking for.

Some cooks parboil potatoes first to prevent them from becoming dry or tough during roasting. I find this extra step unnecessary as long as you stick with smallish, low-starch potatoes.

Choose a heavy pan that will accommodate the potatoes in a single layer without leaving too much space in between, but don't pack them in tight, either. Too many potatoes in the pan means they'll steam rather than roast, and you won't get that toasty flavor and crisp texture. Good choices are a medium roasting pan, a sturdy brownie pan, or a rimmed baking sheet—the rim is important so that the potatoes don't roll off when you turn them during roasting. Keep in mind that the smaller you cut the potatoes, the more room they'll take up.

Toss the potatoes in a little fat for flavor and for browning. Olive oil, butter, and goose or duck fat are all good choices. The potatoes should be lightly coated but not swimming in fat—you want them to roast, not fry. The fat also helps seasonings stick.



To my mind, the ultimate roasted potatoes are simply seasoned with a generous dose of coarse salt and freshly cracked black pepper, but you don't have to stop there. Robust herbs (thyme, rosemary, marjoram, and sage) add great flavor when added before cooking; more tender herbs (parsley, chives, and chervil) are best showered on after cooking. Sometimes I toss the potatoes in a piquant dressing, like the mustard and rosemary one that follows.

Roast potatoes in a moderately hot oven—350° to 400°F. If the recipe calls for 375° and you have something else in the oven at 400°, just roast the potatoes for a shorter time. Check for doneness by piercing a few potatoes with a fork—the tines should sink easily into the tender flesh. The outsides should be nicely browned and crisp in places. After roasting, the potatoes can be held loosely covered in a low (200°) oven for up to an hour before serving—another reason they're so terrific for entertaining.

RECIPES

Classic Roasted Potatoes

This is more of a technique than a recipe, and it can easily be scaled up or down according to how many mouths you're feeding. I often use a small round gratin dish just to roast enough for dinner for two. *Serves four to six.*

2 lb. waxy potatoes, left whole if very small, halved or cut into chunks if large

3 Tbs. olive oil, melted butter, or duck fat

1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme or rosemary (optional)



1 tsp. coarse salt

Plenty of freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 375°F. Spread the potatoes in a single layer in a medium roasting pan or rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with the oil, season with the herbs, salt, and pepper, and toss to coat well. Roast, tossing with a spatula a few times to prevent sticking, until the potatoes are very tender throughout and the skins are somewhat shriveled and crisp, 50 to 60 min., depending on their size and variety. Serve hot.

VARIATION: HERB-ROASTED POTATOES—Following the basic recipe above, use olive oil for the fat and toss the potatoes with 2 Tbs. of any combination of chopped fresh rosemary, thyme, savory, marjoram, and sage. Roast as directed. As soon as the potatoes are done, toss with 3 Tbs. of any combination of chopped fresh parsley, chives, or chervil and the juice of 1 lemon.

Mustard & Rosemary Roasted Potatoes

These potatoes start out looking very wet, but the mixture cooks down to leave the potatoes crisp, crusty, and tangy. *Serves four to six.*

⅓ cup plus 1 Tbs. Dijon mustard

¼ cup olive oil

1 Tbs. dry vermouth or other dry white wine

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary

1 tsp. coarse salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 lb. red-skinned potatoes, cut into ¾- to 1-inch dice

Heat the oven to 400°F. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the mustard, olive oil, vermouth, garlic, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Add the potatoes and toss to

coat. Dump the potatoes onto a large rimmed baking sheet and spread them in a single layer. Roast, tossing with a spatula a few times, until the potatoes are crusty on the outside and tender throughout, 50 to 55 min. Serve hot.

Roasted Potatoes & Turnips

Adding a bit of stock at the start of roasting gives these a creamier, softer texture than dry-roasting—more like potatoes that have been roasted alongside a hefty cut of meat. During roasting, the vegetables absorb the stock and then begin to brown. Once you try this recipe, you might be surprised by how much you like turnips. *Serves four to six.*

3 small bay leaves

2 sprigs fresh thyme

1 lb. yellow-fleshed potatoes, peeled and cut into 1½-inch chunks

1 lb. turnips, peeled and quartered or cut into 1½-inch chunks

½ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock or water

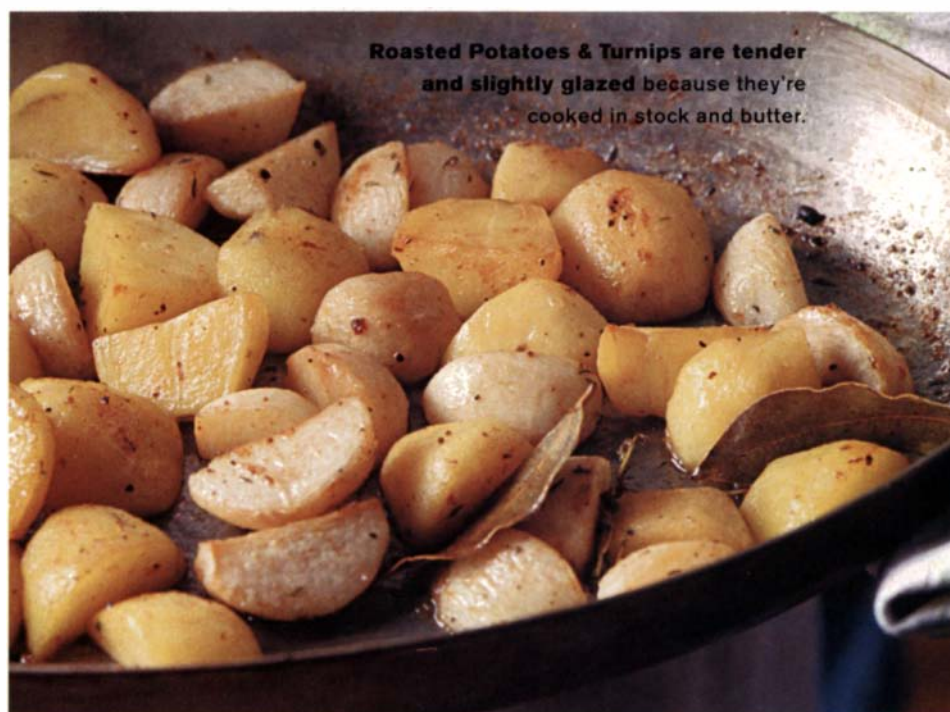
4 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces

1 tsp. coarse salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 375°F. Put the bay leaves and thyme in the bottom of a large gratin dish or a medium roasting pan. Dump the potatoes and turnips on top. Pour in the stock and scatter the butter around. Season with salt and pepper. Roast, tossing with a spatula a few times, until the vegetables are very tender and browned in spots, about 60 min. Remove the thyme and bay leaves and serve hot.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of a potato cookbook to be published by Houghton Mifflin in the fall of 2001. ♦



A Muffin That Tastes Like a Doughnut

Enjoy authentic doughnut flavor in an easy to make muffin; best of all, there's no frying

BY KATHLEEN STEWART



I love doughnuts, but oh, the work involved in making them: the (sometimes yeasted) batter, the rolling, the shaping, and then, finally, the frying. It makes me think of that old Dunkin' Donuts ad with the guy who, stumbling around in the wee hours of the morning, keeps chanting: "Time to make the doughnuts; time to make the doughnuts."

Well, it is time to make doughnuts—doughnut muffins, that is. Aside from being much, much easier to make, these doughnut muffins, which we sell out of every morning at the Downtown Bakery, are simply delicious. A creamed batter yields a light, cakelike interior, while a dip in melted butter mimics the satisfying "friedness" of a doughnut. A generous coating of cinnamon and sugar is the final irresistible touch.

Cream carefully for best results

In most muffin batters, the butter is melted and combined with the wet ingredients, not unlike pancake batter. The texture of my doughnut muffin is more cakelike than muffinlike (a doughnut-muffin-cake anyone?), and so I begin by creaming the butter with the sugar.

Creaming is a crucial step that too often gets short shrift. It incorporates air into the batter, which is especially important for mixtures such as this one that are too heavy to rely solely on chemical leavens, such as baking powder and baking soda. The sugar cuts into the butter, creating tiny air bubbles that get further expanded during baking by the baking powder and the heat of the oven. Proper creaming, therefore, gives you a nice, light crumb.

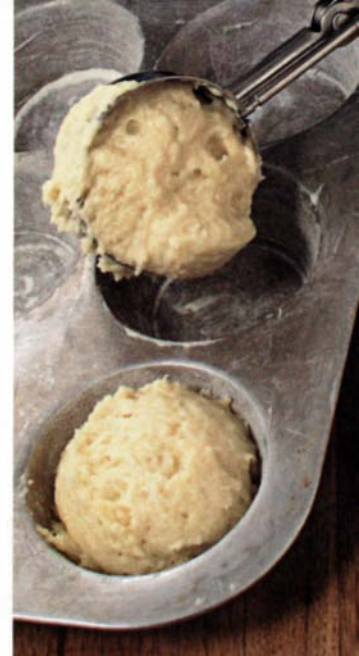
Start with your butter at room temperature. Here's where a lot of people go wrong with creaming. Butter that's too cold won't blend with the sugar, and butter that's too warm won't hold the pockets of air. Butter that's the proper temperature is somewhat firm but soft enough to easily poke a finger into.



Cream with care. Look for a lighter color, an increase in volume, and less obvious sugar granules.



Alternate the dry and wet. Adding the wet and dry ingredients alternately helps keep muffins tender.



A spring-release ice-cream scoop makes quick work of filling the muffin tin. Fill the tins so that the top of the batter is even with the rim.

RECIPE

Doughnut Muffins

You don't have to bake all the muffins right away; the batter will keep, covered and chilled, for up to three days in the refrigerator. *Yields about 24 medium muffins.*

FOR THE MUFFINS:

12 oz. (24 Tbs.) unsalted butter, warmed to room temperature
1¾ cups sugar
4 large eggs
1 lb. 11 oz. (6 cups) all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. plus 2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
1¾ tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1⅔ cups milk
¼ cup buttermilk

FOR DIPPING:

8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter; more as needed
2 cups sugar
2 Tbs. ground cinnamon

To make the muffins—Put a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a stand mixer or a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, until just mixed in. Sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and nutmeg. Combine the milk and buttermilk. With a wooden spoon, mix a quarter of the dry ingredients into the butter mixture. Then mix in a third of the milk mixture. Continue mixing in the remaining dry and wet ingredients alternately, ending with the dry. Mix until well combined and smooth, but don't overmix. Grease and flour a standard-size muffin tin. Scoop enough batter into each tin so that the top of the batter is even with the rim of the cup, about ½ cup. (A #16 ice-cream scoop gives you the perfect amount.) Bake the muffins until firm to the touch, 30 to 35 min.

To finish—Melt the butter for the dipping mixture. Combine the sugar and cinnamon. When the muffins are just cool enough to handle, remove them from the tin, dip them into or brush them all over with the melted butter, and then roll them in the cinnamon sugar.

For best results, use the paddle attachment on a stand mixer and beat on medium, starting with the butter and then adding the sugar in a steady stream.

Cream for longer than you think. The most common mistake is to cream too little; continue beating the butter until the mixture increases in volume, lightens to pale yellow, and the sugar granules no longer look obvious; this may take as long as five minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl once or twice during creaming.

Stop before the butter looks curdled. Although undercreaming is more common, beating the sugar and butter too long will result in a mixture that's grainy and looks somewhat curdled. You can still use it, but the results won't be as light.

Alternate the wet and dry ingredients

The golden rule of muffin making—don't overmix—definitely applies to this hybrid. Overmixing creates gluten, which will toughen the muffin: an unfortunate rhyme but true nonetheless. It also encourages the dissipation of the gases produced by the baking powder; this early dissipation can result in flat muffins.

I mentally divide the dry ingredients into four additions and the wet into three. These small amounts, added gradually and evenly, prevent overmixing.

Dip and roll for doughnut flavor

While the muffins bake, melt the butter for dipping. If you like to keep things neat, you can dip just the tops of the muffins into the butter and then the cinnamon sugar; that way you can use the bottom as a handle and keep your fingers from touching the butter or sugar. But I like to brush the melted butter over the entire muffin and then roll it in the cinnamon sugar. After all, we're trying to dress up a muffin to seem like a doughnut, and it's much more convincing if the entire muffin wears the disguise.

Kathleen Stewart runs the *Down-town Bakery & Creamery* in *Healdsburg, California*. ♦

Flavorful Pastas

For great main-dish pastas, make a robust sauté, and then toss the noodles right into the pan

BY MOLLY STEVENS

A box of pasta is one of the first things I reach for on a busy weeknight when I've got no real plan for dinner and no inclination to drive to the market for special ingredients. At first, my impromptu pasta dinners were little more than pasta tossed with cooked vegetables, olive oil, and a bit of grated cheese, but over the years, I've learned techniques for getting deeper, more integrated flavors into the entire dish.

The basic method is to make a chunky sauce by sautéing a mix of aromatic vegetables, poultry, meat, or seafood in a large sauté pan while the pasta boils (in Italy, the rough, juicy, highly flavored mix of ingredients I've just described is called *condimento*). When the pasta is ready, you drain it and then add it to the sauté pan, where it cooks for just a minute or two more to absorb the flavors of the sauce, transforming it into a deliciously integrated tossed pasta.

For the tastiest sauté, first lay down a flavor base with a bit of fat

The first step for a sauté pan pasta is to choose a fat to establish a flavor base for the entire dish. Fat is a great flavor carrier, so this first step ensures that the fla-



A quick sauté of leeks and prosciutto, enriched with cream, becomes the saucy base for linguine.

vors of whatever subsequent ingredients you choose will permeate the dish.

Start with a little olive oil or butter. Olive oil is usually my first choice, but sometimes I use butter for a sweeter, richer flavor—it's especially good with slow-cooked vegetables, like the leeks in the Linguine with Leeks, Prosciutto & Lemon on p. 58. Butter burns easily, though, so in the recipes that need high-heat sautéing, I've called for half butter and half olive oil to prevent scorching.

For a deeper, almost smoky flavor base, brown some bacon, pancetta, or sausage. Once the meat is nicely browned, reserve it to add later on, and keep a few tablespoons of the rendered fat in the pan to help flavor the dish, along with the cooked-on brown bits. (I like to save fat scraps from prosciutto and melt them with the olive oil; they add a lovely aromatic hint to this type of pasta.) If you happen to have any duck fat on hand, try it with poultry, with cabbage or



Molly Stevens then adds just-boiled pasta to the pan. Dried pasta is better than fresh for absorbing flavor.

other hearty winter greens, or with mushrooms and sage or rosemary.

Next, add the aromatics

Once you've got fat flavoring the pan, add at least one member of the onion family (chopped onion, garlic, shallots, leeks, or scallions) and cook until tender and fragrant. This is also a good time to add other flavorings such as robust herbs (rosemary, thyme, or sage), crushed spices, or even minced anchovies, which melt into the sauce, giving it a gentle piquancy and surprisingly un-fishy flair, as in the Gemelli with Cauliflower, Scallions & Green Olives on p. 58. At this point, be sure to season the sauté with salt and pepper—do it liberally, keeping in mind that because the sauté is to be tossed with pasta, the flavors need to be good and full.

Now, choose the principal flavors

With this delicious base of sautéed aromatics, the dish can now go in almost any

from the Sauté Pan

The noodles in Linguine with Leeks, Prosciutto & Lemon get great flavor from soaking up the creamy pan sauce.



direction. Meat, poultry, vegetables, seafood: the possibilities are endless. Choose one or two principal flavors to give the final dish its character—avoid the kitchen-sink approach of adding a little bit of everything, or you'll end up with a muddle. Some classic and delicious flavor pairs that you'll see in the recipes starting on p. 58 are sausage and a bitter green like Swiss chard, chicken with mushrooms, and cauliflower or broccoli with briny-salty flavors like green olives and anchovies.

When choosing vegetables for sauté pan pastas, consider texture and cook-

ing time. While more delicate, shorter-cooking vegetables such as mushrooms, chard, and leeks are great sautéed right along with the onions and aromatics, hardier, longer-cooking ones such as green beans, broccoli, potatoes, and cauliflower need parcooking before you add them to the sauté. Use the pasta water for this: just drop in the vegetables and scoop them out when just tender, leaving the water boiling and ready for the pasta. The benefit here is threefold: the vegetable-infused water will flavor the pasta as it boils, the vegetables in the final dish will be tender, and there will be

flavored pasta water on hand with which to finish the dish.

Use dried pasta, not fresh

It's important that the cooked pasta hold its shape and texture after being tossed with the sauce and left to simmer. Fresh pasta is too soft and more apt to fall apart. Dried pasta is "thirstier" and better at absorbing the flavors in the sauté pan.

Add salt to the pasta water, but hold the oil. Unsalted pasta will be bland no matter how much seasoning you add to the finished dish. For every three or four quarts of fiercely boiling water—never cook pasta in less than this—dump in a generous tablespoon of salt; enough to make the water taste seawater-salty. Although oil will keep the noodles from sticking together, it also keeps the sauce from sticking to the pasta. Skip it.

Cook the pasta just until *al dente*, because you'll be letting it simmer for a minute or two to soak up the flavors of the pan sauce. Start checking the pasta a few minutes before the time suggested on the package, and drain it when it still has a good "bite" left to it. Shake the colander gently to get rid of some of the water but not all: the starchy water clinging to the noodles will help thicken the sauce.

Add just enough liquid for a saucy consistency

In the end, the success of this technique relies on having enough flavorful liquid in the pan to ensure a consistency that's saucy (but not soupy) so that the sauté blends with and clings to the pasta.

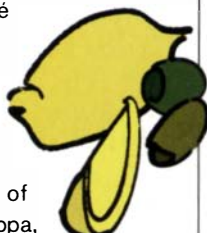
For every half pound of pasta, add ½ to 1 cup of liquid. You can use cream, chicken or vegetable stock, the poaching liquid from shellfish or vegetables, or even the broth from a pot of beans. And, again, the boiling water from the pasta works well, too. When using pasta water, ladle off and reserve a cup or so of the water just before draining the pasta. I take it from the center of the pot where there's generally a vortex of foam, indicating that there's a good deal of starch. While pasta

Top off your own pastas with these finishing touches

When you're creating your own pasta dishes, here are a few ways to give them more zip once you've added the pasta to the sauté and let it simmer for a minute or two:

Add piquancy

with capers, a splash of vinegar, a squeeze of lemon, a dash of grappa, or a handful of chopped olives or reconstituted sun-dried tomatoes.



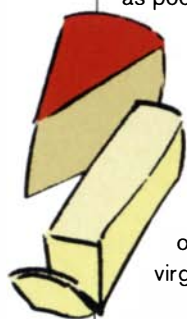
Add texture and substance

with crunchy toasted nuts or breadcrumbs (known in Italy as poor man's Parmesan).

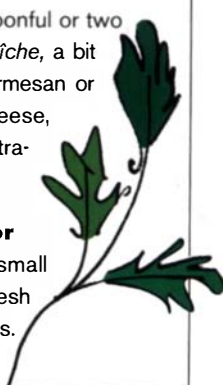


Add richness and heft

by stirring in a knob of sweet butter, a spoonful or two of crème fraîche, a bit of grated Parmesan or other hard cheese, or a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.



Add fresh color and flavor with a small handful of chopped fresh parsley, basil, or chives.



water won't give you as much flavor as a rich stock, it will extend the chunky sauce, and the starch in the water helps the sauce cling to the pasta.

I've given approximate amounts for liquids in the recipes; you'll use more or less depending on how much the pan needs for a finished pasta that's just saucy or brothy enough. Remember that if you've added too much liquid, you can always crank up the heat at the last minute to boil off the excess.

Sauté pan pastas are ripe for improvisation. The recipes that follow are some of my favorites, but once you get the hang of the technique, have fun devising new combinations.

RECIPES

Linguine with Leeks, Prosciutto & Lemon

This recipe is also good with a wider, flat pasta such as fettuccine or tagliatelle. Trimming the prosciutto fat and rendering it at the start of this dish gives a little extra depth. If your market trims the fat from its prosciutto, just proceed using an extra tablespoon of butter to sauté the leeks. *Serves four.*

- 4 oz. thinly sliced prosciutto, excess fat trimmed and reserved, lean part cut into ¼-inch-wide strips**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 3 small leeks, white and tender green parts only, sliced (to yield about 2 cups) and well rinsed**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- 1 lb. dried linguine**
- 1 Tbs. lemon zest**
- Juice of ½ lemon**
- ¾ cup walnuts, roughly chopped and lightly toasted**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for cooking the pasta. Chop the trimmed prosciutto fat, if using, and put it in a large skillet with the butter. Heat over medium until the butter is melted and the fat is translucent. Add the leeks, season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg, and cover. Cook, stirring occasionally, until tender but not browned, about 10 min. Add the prosciutto, stirring to distribute, and then add the cream. Reduce the heat to low and let heat gently, uncovered, while you cook the pasta until just tender. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water and then drain the pasta, leaving drops of water clinging to it. Add the pasta and half of the reserved pasta cooking water to the skillet. Stir in the lemon zest and juice; season abundantly with black pepper. Heat gently for a few minutes to let the pasta drink up the sauce, adding more pasta cooking water if needed to thin it. Add the walnuts and taste for salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

Gemelli with Cauliflower, Scallions & Green Olives

Don't be afraid of the anchovies in this recipe. They melt right into the sauce and give it great flavor. Substitute broccoli for the cauliflower if you like. Toasted breadcrumbs add a crunchy finishing touch. *Serves two generously.*



Pasta water does triple duty: it blanches the vegetables, cooks the pasta, and moistens the finished dish.



Reserve some pasta cooking water. Besides adding juiciness to the sauce, the starch helps the sauce cling to the pasta.

- ½ head cauliflower, cut into large florets**
- 3 to 4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**
- 3 scallions, white parts finely chopped; greens cut into ½-inch pieces**
- Generous pinch dried red pepper flakes**
- 6 to 8 anchovy fillets, chopped**
- 8 oz. dried gemelli, fusilli, or cavatappi**
- ½ cup fresh, slightly coarse breadcrumbs, toasted in a 400°F oven for 3 to 4 minutes until golden**
- ½ cup cracked green olives, pitted and coarsely chopped**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Drop the cauliflower into the boiling water and cook until the florets offer little resistance when pierced with the tip of a knife, 3 to 4 min. (Don't let the cauliflower become at all mushy.) With a slotted spoon or a skimmer, remove the cauliflower from the pot and drain it. Return the water to a



Toasted breadcrumbs add a crunchy finish to Gemelli with Cauliflower, Scallions & Green Olives.

boil for cooking the pasta. When the cauliflower is cool enough to handle, cut the florets into smaller pieces and set aside. In a large skillet, heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil over medium-low heat. Add the garlic and scallion whites and cook until fragrant but not browned, about 5 min. Add the pepper flakes and anchovies, crushing them with a wooden spoon, and cook for another 1 to 2 min. Remove the skillet from the heat while you cook the pasta. Just before the pasta is done, return the skillet to medium-high heat and add the cauliflower and half of the breadcrumbs. Cook, tossing once or twice, until heated through. When the pasta is just tender, reserve 1 cup of pasta cooking water and then drain the pasta, leaving drops of water clinging to it. Add the pasta and a ½ cup of the reserved pasta cooking water to the skillet, using more or less as needed. Stir in the olives and the scallion greens. Drizzle with the remaining olive oil to taste. Heat gently for a few minutes so that flavors meld. Taste for salt and pepper. Serve warm, passing the remaining breadcrumbs at the table.

Fettuccine with Shrimp & Garlic

I drizzle on a bit of extra-virgin olive oil to finish this pasta. *Serves two generously.*

4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for finishing
3 large cloves garlic, cut in very thin slices
8 oz. medium shrimp, peeled and deveined, or large shrimp, halved
½ tsp. grated orange zest

Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup dry white wine
14½-oz. can whole tomatoes, drained and roughly chopped
8 oz. dried fettuccine or spaghetti
3 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

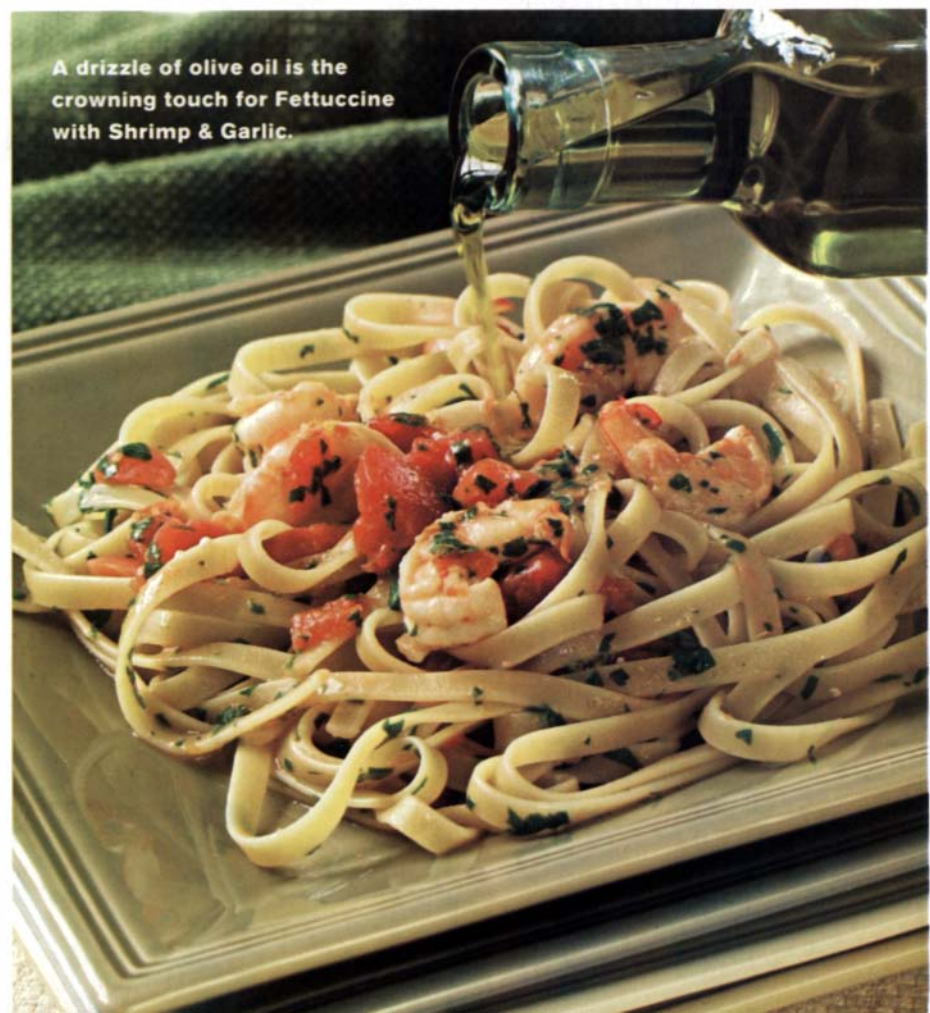
Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for cooking the pasta. In a large skillet over low heat, combine the olive oil and garlic. Cook gently, stirring, until the garlic is just fragrant and beginning to turn golden, 2 to 4 min.; don't let it brown or crisp. Add the shrimp and zest; season with salt and pepper. Raise the heat to medium high and sear the shrimp quickly just until they turn bright pink, about 1 min. on each side—they don't need to be cooked through at this point. Add the wine and let it simmer for 1 min. Stir in the tomatoes and cook until heated through. Set aside over very low heat if the pasta is not yet ready. Meanwhile, cook the pasta until just tender. Reserve ½ cup of the cooking water and then drain the pasta, leaving drops of water clinging to it. Add the pasta and half of the reserved cooking liquid to the skillet. Gently simmer for a few minutes so the flavors meld and the pasta can drink up the sauce. Stir in the parsley, taste for salt and pepper, and serve warm with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

Penne with Sausage, Chard & Pine Nuts

This simple recipe is a weeknight staple in our house. I vary the basic recipe by using escarole, Savoy cabbage, radicchio, or endive in place of the chard, and pancetta or smoked bacon in place of the sausage. *Serves two generously.*

1 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
5 oz. sweet Italian sausage (about 2 sausage links), casings removed, meat crumbled
1 small red onion, chopped
1 small bunch red, green, or yellow Swiss chard, tougher stems removed, leaves roughly chopped
2 small cloves garlic, minced
Pinch dried red pepper flakes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup chicken or vegetable stock or dry white wine
8 oz. dried penne or fusilli
1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar; more to taste
¼ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for cooking the pasta. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the sausage; cook, breaking it up and stirring with a wooden spoon, until browned and cooked through, 7 to 10 min. With a





Penne with Sausage, Chard & Pine Nuts gets a flavor boost from a dash of balsamic vinegar added at the end of cooking.

slotted spoon, remove the sausage and set aside. If the pan seems a bit dry, add enough oil so there's about 3 Tbs. fat in the pan. Return the pan to medium heat, add the onion, and cook until just tender, 3 to 5 min., stirring and scraping up any browned bits with a wooden spoon. Add the chard, garlic, and pepper flakes, season with salt and pepper, and toss until the chard begins to sizzle, about 1 min. Add the stock, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the chard is tender, 6 to 8 min. Meanwhile, cook the pasta until just tender. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta water and then drain the pasta, leaving drops of water clinging to it. Add the pasta and ¼ cup of the cooking water to the skillet, using more of the water if needed. Return the sausage to the pan and add the balsamic vinegar. Heat gently for a few minutes to let the flavors meld. Add the pine nuts and half of the Parmesan, and taste for salt and pepper. Add a bit more of the cooking water if the pan seems dry. Serve warm, passing the remaining Parmesan cheese at the table.

Pasta Shells with Chicken, Mushrooms & Capers

I prefer chicken thighs here because the flavor of the dark meat marries nicely with

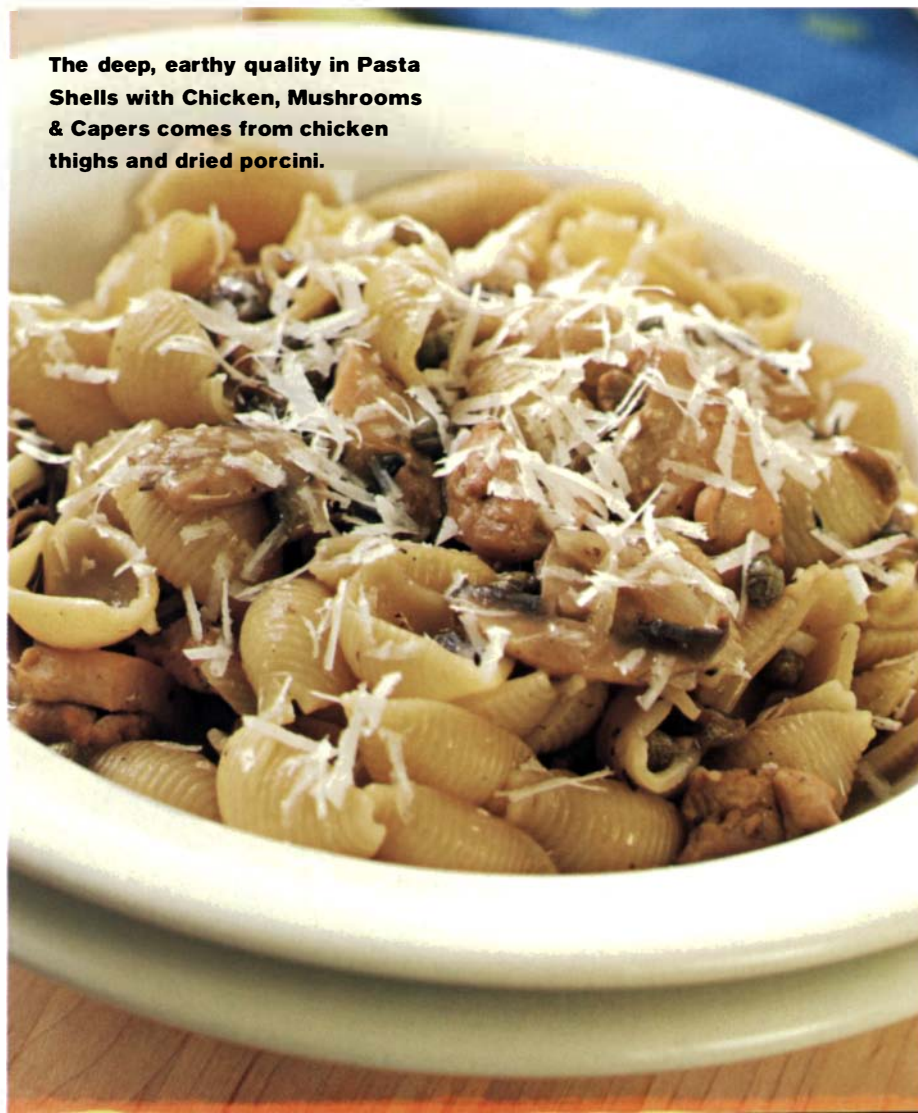
the hearty, savory character of this dish, but if you prefer, substitute breast meat. Here's a great place to use good-quality salt-cured capers (soaked in water for 15 minutes and rinsed) if you can find them. *Serves two generously.*

½ oz. dried porcini mushrooms, soaked in 1¼ cups warm water for 30 min.
2 Tbs. olive oil
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
4 oz. button mushrooms, wiped clean and sliced
1 large shallot, thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, minced
1½ tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
¾ lb. skinless, boneless chicken thighs (3 to 4 thighs), cut into bite-size pieces
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup dry white wine
6 to 8 oz. dried pasta shells or farfalle
Splash of sherry vinegar
2 Tbs. capers, rinsed
Grated Romano cheese for serving (optional)

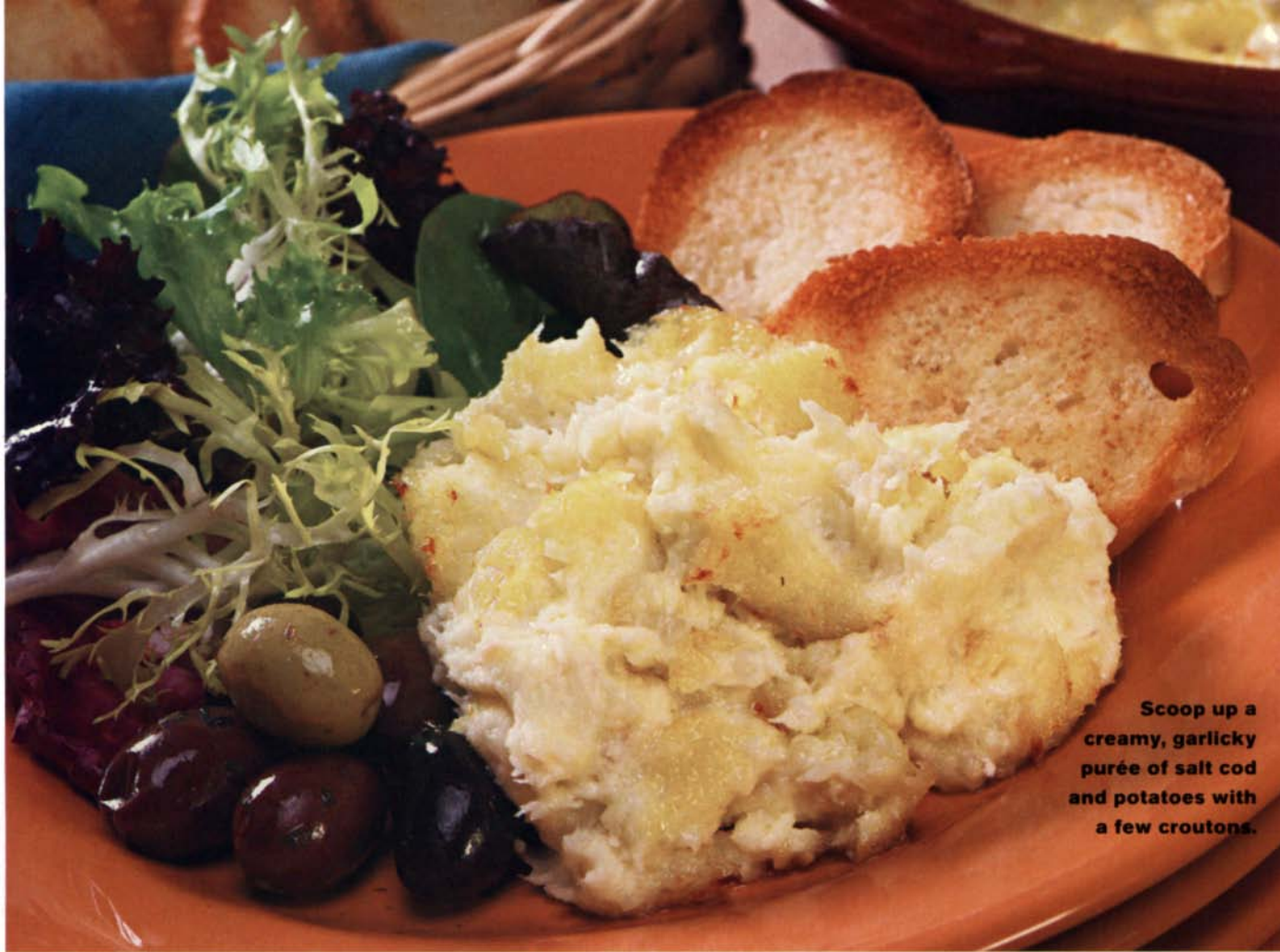
Strain the porcini, reserving the soaking liquid. Squeeze them dry, chop them into small pieces, and set aside. Strain the soaking liquid through a fine sieve or a

coffee filter; set aside. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for cooking the pasta. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat the oil and 2 Tbs. of the butter. Add the fresh mushrooms and cook briskly, stirring frequently, until lightly browned and most of their liquid has evaporated, about 5 min. Add the shallot, garlic, rosemary, and the drained, chopped porcini. Cook, stirring briskly, until the shallot is soft, about 4 min. Add the chicken pieces, season with salt and pepper, and cook for another 2 min. Pour in the wine and the reserved porcini soaking liquid; bring to a boil. Simmer uncovered until the chicken is tender and cooked through, about 12 min. Meanwhile, cook the pasta until just tender. Drain the pasta, leaving drops of water clinging to it, and add it to the skillet. Add the vinegar and capers; heat gently for a few minutes to let the pasta drink up the juices. Stir in the remaining 1 Tbs. butter and taste for salt and pepper. Serve warm with the grated Romano, if you like.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



The deep, earthy quality in Pasta Shells with Chicken, Mushrooms & Capers comes from chicken thighs and dried porcini.



Scoop up a creamy, garlicky purée of salt cod and potatoes with a few croutons.

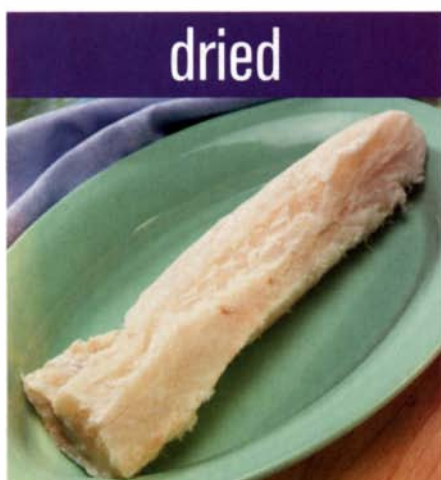
Salt Cod Classics

Give salt cod a long soak and then use it as a base for classic Mediterranean dishes like fritters and Provençal *brandade*

BY MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

Unless you were lucky enough to grow up immersed in a Mediterranean or Latin cuisine (or in New England), you're probably wondering just exactly what salt cod is. I know I had never seen salt cod until I went to live in France. And it was only when I began cooking in Provence that I really learned anything about it, like the fact that it is, quite literally, fresh cod that has been cured—or preserved—in salt and then dried. I learned that to enjoy salt cod, it must be thoroughly soaked to remove the salt. Best of all, I discovered that desalted salt cod actually has a more interesting flavor and texture than fresh cod—almost like ham compared to fresh pork—and it's delicious paired with traditional Mediterranean flavors like garlic and olive oil.

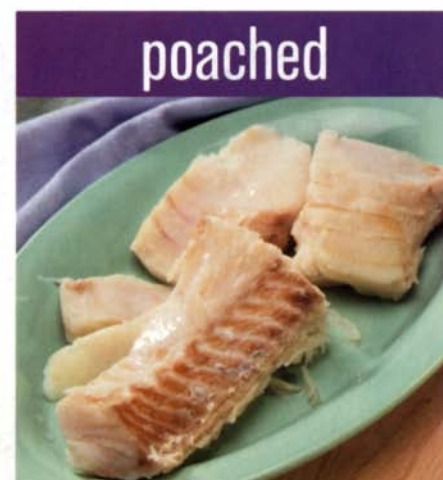
Salt cod first became popular before the days of refrigeration in countries with Catholic traditions. It was often the only fish to be had during Lent, on Fridays, and at other times of fasting. But the love for traditional salt cod dishes—like the fritters and *brandade* (a purée of salt cod and potatoes) I've included here—has never died, and immigrants to the United States have kept demand for salt cod high here. Once I knew about salt cod, I discovered that it's available all over the U.S. in neighborhood markets—and some large grocery stores—in Italian,



dried
The best salt cod is creamy white and cut into thick pieces.



soaked
Soak the fish for 48 hours; it will feel soft and pliable.



poached
After soaking, gently poach the salt cod to use in your recipe.

Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Cuban, and Caribbean communities. It's probably most widely available in New England, where it's traditional fare in coastal communities. Most of the salt cod sold here comes from Canada. Sometimes it's sold under different names: *bacalhau* (Portuguese), *bacallà* (Catalan), or *bacalao* (Basque). It's also easier to find around Christmas and Easter, when more of it is sold.

Choose thick, creamy white pieces. At the store, look for uniform texture and color; avoid pieces with a yellowish tint. To my mind, the thicker the piece, the better. When pressed, the surface should be smooth. My favorite pieces are sometimes called "middles" or "loins": they're cut from the thickest part of the fish. A few bones may still cling to them, but they're easily removed after poaching.

Most salt cod is sold skinless and boneless, which is easier to handle. Sometimes you'll see whole skinless, boneless fillets in large crates. They will vary in thickness but are often better quality than the pieces sold in plastic bags. You'll also see salt cod packed in small wooden boxes. These contain folded fillets; some may be thin, but the quality should be fine.

Before cooking, soak salt cod for 48 hours. Eating salt cod that hasn't been properly desalted may be why some people think they don't like this fish. Some cooks tell you that 24 hours is sufficient, but too often, that's not enough. I prefer to desalt mine for 48 hours. Salt cod varies from piece to piece; the thickness of the fillet or steak and the salting and drying method at the source are all variables. To desalt the cod, cut it into chunks, put them in a large bowl, and cover with water. Change the water at least four times a day over 48 hours. Although some say you needn't refrigerate the soaking fish, I usually do—if nothing else, to keep it away from my cat. To check that your fish is sufficiently desalted, taste a bit: it should be appealingly briny, but not salty.

Cook salt cod before using it in other dishes. Gently poach the salt cod until it reaches a nice flaky consistency. If you boil it vigorously, it tends to toughen and get cottony. After cooking, flake the fish into pieces. Use your hands so you'll be able to detect any bones. Gently rub the fish between your first two fingers and thumb; it should fall apart into distinct, slippery flakes. Then proceed with your recipe.

RECIPES

Provençal Salt Cod & Potato Purée (*Brandade with Potatoes*)

Brandade de morue is a voluptuous purée of salt cod enriched with milk and olive oil that's distinguished all over Provence by varying amounts of garlic. This recipe is a more modern version of *brandade* with mashed potatoes added to it. It can be served as an appetizer with crusty bread or as a side dish. Serves eight as a starter; four to six as a side dish.

- 1 lb. salt cod, desalted (see soaking method in text at left)**
- 2 medium onions, quartered**
- 7 large cloves garlic (3 halved, 4 minced)**
- 2 bay leaves**
- 12 oz. waxy potatoes, peeled and quartered**
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. coarse salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste**

Heat the oven to 375°F. Oil a small (4-cup) gratin dish. In a medium saucepan, combine 2 qt. water with

More salt cod recipes

If you want to discover more ways to use salt cod, check out *Catalan Cuisine*, by Colman Andrews; *Simple French Food*, by Richard Olney; and *A Mediterranean Feast*, by Clifford A. Wright.

the onions, the halved garlic, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, add the salt cod, and cover the pot tightly. Turn off the heat and let the fish sit in the water just until it can be pulled apart with a fork, 10 to 15 min. Remove the fish from the water and set the water aside for cooking the potatoes. When the fish is cool enough to handle, pick out any bones and remove any skin. Flake the fish by rubbing it between your fingers or using a fork or wooden spoon. Transfer to a food processor.

Meanwhile, simmer the potatoes until very tender in the water in which you cooked the fish. Drain the potatoes and mash with a hand masher or ricer. Add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of the milk and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the olive oil to the potatoes and combine well. Set aside.

In a saucepan, heat another $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the oil over medium low and add the minced garlic. The instant the garlic begins to sizzle, remove the pan from the heat. Add the garlic and oil, along with the salt, to the salt cod in the processor. Combine the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil. Turn on the processor and add the milk and olive oil mixture in a slow stream. Continue to process until the mixture is fluffy. Add the salt cod purée to the potato mixture and fold to combine well. Season with pepper. Spoon the mixture into the gratin dish, drizzle with 1 to 2 Tbs. olive oil, and bake until the top begins to brown, 20 to 25 min. Serve hot.

Salt Cod Fritters

Wherever a salt cod tradition exists, there is a version of a fritter, a croquette, or a codfish ball. The addition of a little mayonnaise for moisture and flavor gives these Mediterranean fritters a North American touch. *Yields 10 fritters.*

1 lb. salt cod, desalted (see soaking method in text at far left)

4 large eggs

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 large clove garlic, minced

1 Tbs. finely chopped onion

1 tsp. crushed cumin seeds

4 Tbs. mayonnaise

Pinch cayenne

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups dried breadcrumbs

All-purpose flour for dredging

8 to 9 cups canola oil (or enough to measure 4 to 5 inches deep in the pot) for deep-frying

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and then reduce the heat so that the water is simmering. Add the salt cod and cover tightly. Turn off the heat and let the cod sit until the fish can be pulled apart with a fork or your fingers but is still moist, 10 to 15 min. Remove the fish from the water. When cool enough to handle, remove any bones and break up the fish.

Put the fish in a food processor and process until uniformly mashed. Add 2 of the eggs and process until well incorporated and the mixture is fluffy. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the parsley, garlic, onion, cumin seeds, mayonnaise, cayenne, salt, and pepper. Gradually add $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the breadcrumbs and mix them in; stop adding when the mixture is stiff.



Shape the fritters like hockey pucks and then dredge them in flour and dip into beaten eggs.



Coat the flour and egg-dipped fritter with breadcrumbs and refrigerate for 30 minutes.



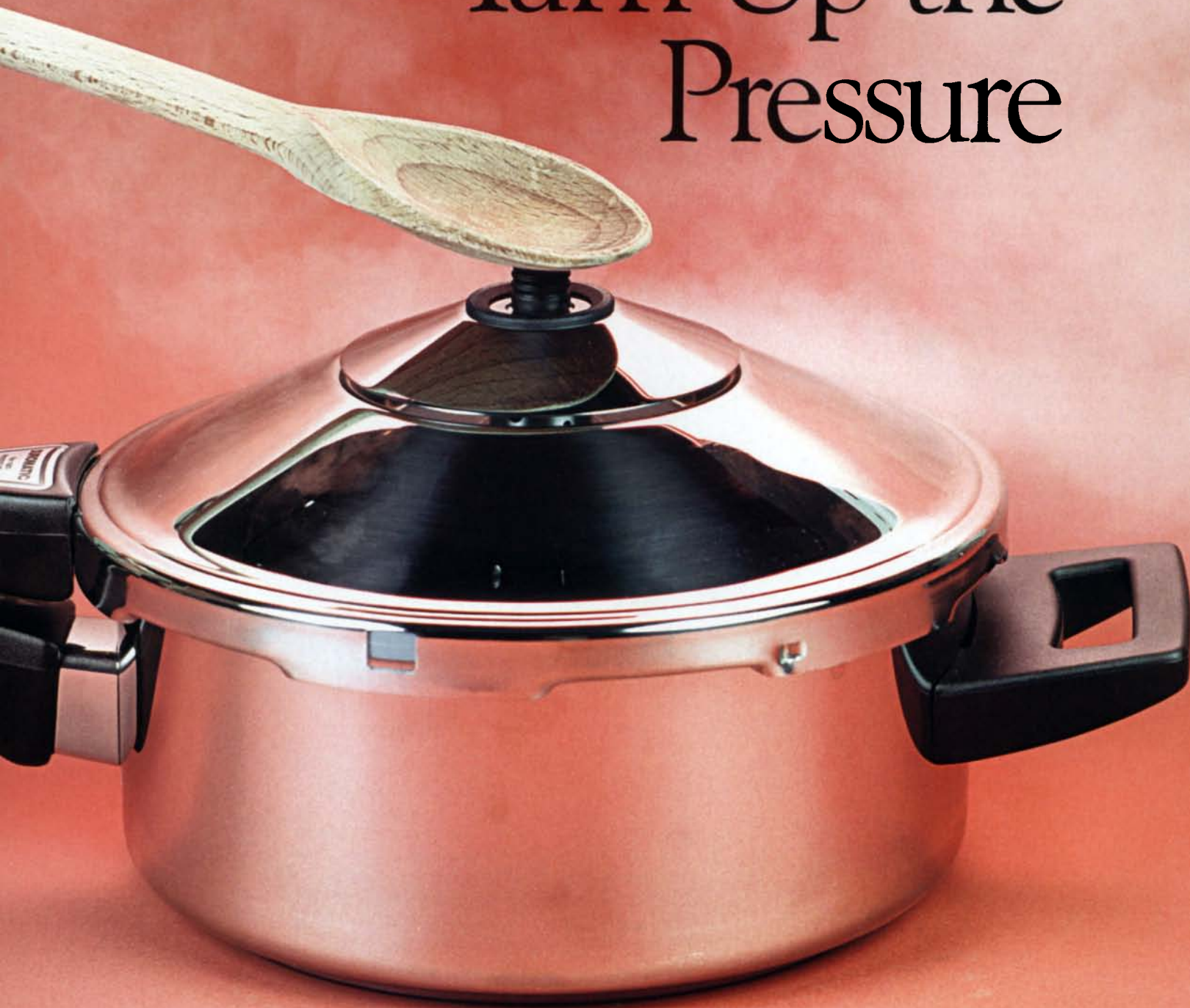
Moisten your hands and shape the fish mixture into small disks (like hockey pucks) about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and 1 inch thick. In a bowl, beat the remaining 2 eggs; put the flour on one piece of waxed paper and the remaining breadcrumbs on another. Dredge the disks in the flour, dip in the beaten egg, and roll in the breadcrumbs. Set on a plate and refrigerate for 30 min.

Heat the oil in a deep-fryer or a deep stockpot to 375°F. Deep-fry the fritters, a few at a time, until deep golden brown, 2 to 3 min. Bring the oil back to 375°F before frying each batch. (If the oil is too hot, the fritters will darken very quickly without getting quite hot enough all the way through; if too cool, they'll absorb too much oil.) Drain the fritters on paper towels. Serve with tomato sauce, mayonnaise, or aioli, if you like.

Pay attention to temperature when frying so your fritters will be crisp and golden outside, moist inside.

Martha Rose Shulman is the author of Mediterranean Light, Provençal Light, The Vegetarian Feast, and many other cookbooks. She lives in Los Angeles. ♦

For Slow-Cooked
Flavor in a Hurry,
Turn Up the
Pressure



Every pressure-cooker enthusiast has a story of the time she first realized the potential of these pots. Mine came one wet February evening after a particularly harrowing commute on icy New England roads. When I finally got home—exhausted, starving, and in no mood to cook—what I craved was a bowl of chili. Canned or take-out chili wouldn't do. I needed long-braised cubes of pork shoulder in a rich, red chile sauce, the kind of stew that requires hours of slow simmering. In desperation, I pulled out my near-forgotten pressure cooker, and half an hour later, I sat down to dinner.

The chili I made that night stays in my memory. It was rich and full-bodied, with pork that fell into pieces at the slightest urging of my fork. I realized then that the slow-cooking stews and braises I love so much could be made on short notice any night of the week, and my pressure cooker has played a vital role in my kitchen ever since.

No more rattling time bombs

It doesn't take a physics degree to understand how pressure cookers work. The lid, which is fitted with a rubber gasket, forms an airtight seal once it's locked into position. As the contents of the pot heat up, steam gets trapped and pressure builds. At 15 pounds of pressure (the typical "high pressure" setting on a cooker), water boils at 250°F, almost 40°F higher than in conventional pots. The high pressure and temperature break down food fibers more quickly, shortening cooking time dramatically.

The pressure cookers you'll find in stores today are a far cry from their predecessors, which were thin-bottomed aluminum pots with jiggling steam regulators that often clogged, resulting in an occasional lid flying off. The new "second-generation" cookers have locking lids that prevent pressure from building if the pots aren't properly sealed and safety valves that release steam if the pressure gets too high, making those legendary (and perhaps apocryphal) kitchen mishaps a thing of the past. They're also quieter. A gentle hissing is the only sound you'll hear from these contemporary cookers.

In more than ten years of using my pressure cooker, and while testing several

Rich, full-bodied chili in 30 minutes? Artichokes in 10? You can do it with a pressure cooker

BY JAN NEWBERRY

models for this story, I've never had a lid fly off or felt I had a time bomb ticking on my stove. Do use common sense, though. Never leave the house with a pressure cooker on the stove or leave one unattended for too long. It won't blow up, but steam will be released through the safety valves and the pot could cook dry.

Best for foods that like slow cooking and moist heat

Pressure-cooker manufacturers might like you to believe that their products are ideal for cooking everything from adzuki beans to zucchini, but that's not quite the case—quick-cooking foods like fish and tender vegetables are better prepared by other methods, in my opinion. Generally, pressure cookers perform best with foods that benefit from long, slow cooking and moist heat. My cooker springs to mind whenever I'm cooking the following:

- ◆ **Unsoaked dried beans**, which get plump and tender in less than 30 minutes. Presoaked beans cook even faster.
- ◆ **Tough, flavorful cuts of meats**, such as short ribs, pork shoulder, or veal shank, which require long cooking to get tender. My pressure cooker produces an awesome *osso buco* in less than 30 minutes.

- ◆ **Soups, stews, stocks, and long-cooking sauces** like marinara or ragù, which develop deep flavor in 20 minutes or less. Because the pressure cooker is so efficient at extracting flavor and gelatin from meat bones, making homemade meat or chicken broth doesn't have to be an all-day affair.

- ◆ **Grains**, such as wheatberries and brown rice, which cook in just 20 minutes compared to the usual 45. Many pressure-cooker aficionados rave about fast, no-stir risotto (though I think that pressure-cooked risotto doesn't have the same complexity of flavor that comes from reducing the stock and stirring the rice constantly; decide for yourself—try the risotto recipe on p. 67).

Some manufacturers caution that grains may foam up and clog the steam vents. To prevent this, add a tablespoon of oil or butter per cup of dry grain and fill the cooker just to the halfway mark.

- ◆ **Sturdy vegetables**, such as potatoes, beets, and hardy greens. In ten minutes of high pressure, artichokes steam to an even doneness and potatoes cook to perfection. Whenever I'm making potato salad, grilled potatoes, or any dish that calls for boiled potatoes, I steam the spuds in my pressure cooker. Any greens that I'd normally braise, such as kale, collards, or mustard greens, break down to a tender side dish in just two minutes.

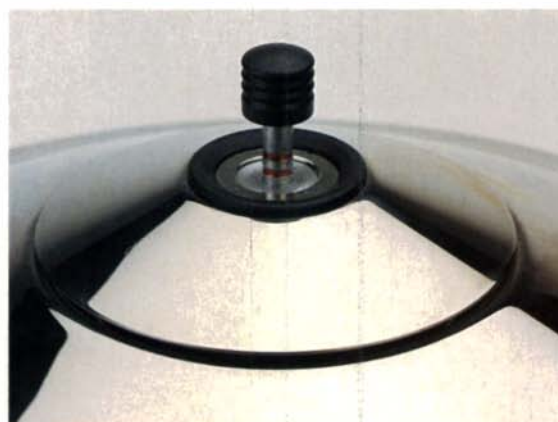
As with any new piece of cooking equipment, you need to use the cooker a few times to get comfortable with it. Once you make a dish that you like, use that as a starting point for similar dishes. Eventually, you'll be able to pull together a dish using a loose recipe in your head. Here's a generalized formula for a richly flavored pressure-cooked soup or stew; it's easily varied depending on what's on hand. This dish has four very flexible components:

- ◆ **2 to 3 pounds meat or poultry**—try chicken parts, pork sausage, or beef or lamb shanks;
- ◆ **2 to 3 pounds vegetables**—try potatoes, carrots, turnips, parsnips, mushrooms, even hardy greens;
- ◆ **1 to 2 cups dried beans or rice**—you might want to start with lentils, chickpeas, white beans, or white rice;
- ◆ **aromatic flavorings and spices**—garlic cloves, peppercorns, a bay leaf, a

Features to consider before purchasing



Size and materials



Multiple pressure settings



Two handles



Trivets and steaming baskets



Quick release of pressure

quartered onion or leek, fresh herbs, and citrus zest all add lots of flavor.

Start by heating oil in the cooker and browning the meat or chicken. Add the vegetables (if necessary, peeled and cut in large chunks), stir in the beans or rice, and add any aromatic flavorings plus salt. Pour in water or, if you want, stock. If you're aiming for a soup, add more liquid; for a thicker stew, add less (do be sure to add the minimum amount your pressure cooker requires). Lock on the lid, bring the pot up to high pressure, and cook for 10 to 25 minutes, calculating the cooking time based on the longest-cooking ingredient, usually the beans; check the cooker's manual for guidelines.

If you like the notion of using a pressure cooker but hesitate to start without a firm recipe, you'll find plenty of help in the bookstore. Here are a few suggestions: ♦ *Express Cooking*, by Barry Bluestein & Kevin Morrissey (HP Books);

♦ *Pressure Cooking for Everyone*, by Rick Rodgers & Arlene Ward (Chronicle);

♦ *The Pressured Cook, Cooking Under Pressure*, and *Great Vegetarian Cooking Under Pressure*, by Lorna Sass (all from William Morrow).

What to look for in a pressure cooker

For this article, I tried many different styles and brands of pressure cooker with prices ranging from about \$80 for a basic 4-quart pot with one pressure setting and no steaming basket, up to \$160 for a 7-quart pot with all the fixings (see Sources, p. 80, for some major brands). They all worked well and consistently. Here are some things to consider when shopping.

Size and material. A 4-quart pot is compact, manageable, and perfectly adequate for a small family, but if I owned just one pressure cooker, I'd probably stick to a more versatile 6-quart, which is just

right for big batches of chili or marinara, for parties, and for bulky globe artichokes. Keep in mind that you can't fill the cooker to capacity; usually the maximum fill line is one-half to two-thirds of the way up the side. As for material, I'd keep to stainless-steel cookers rather than aluminum.

A new design in cookers that I like is a pressure fry pan. Its shallow sides make it easy to brown meat, which can be awkward in the larger, deeper pots. It's perfect for pressure-braising a couple of pork chops or for making a quick batch of jambalaya. If I were buying a second pressure cooker, this would be it.

Quick release of pressure. I appreciate this feature, which lets steam escape rapidly so the pressure drops fast and food doesn't overcook. Some are as simple as pushing a button or flipping a lever, while others require that you hold the valve down with either a fingertip or a long-handled spoon or spatula until all the

pressure has been released. Without this feature, you must move the cooker to a sink and let cold water wash down one side to get the pressure to drop quickly.

Multiple and preset pressure levels. Most new pressure cookers give you a visual clue as to when high pressure has been reached—usually it's a button that pops up—but some models do more than that. I like those that let me set the pressure level in advance by turning a dial to the desired setting. Mostly, I cook on high pressure, but I sometimes use the lower setting for tender foods.

Two handles. I prefer models with a place to grip the pot on both sides, rather than by a single long handle, simply because they're easier to carry to the sink to release pressure. Before choosing a cooker, practice locking and opening the lid on various models; some are more of a struggle than others.

Trivets and steaming baskets. These are handy for steaming vegetables or for keeping custard ramekins or cheesecakes above the water and removing them from the pan. (Yes, you can cook a cheesecake in a pressure cooker!)

A lid for conventional cooking. Pressure cookers can do double duty as a regular pot. Their heavyweight bases distribute heat evenly and keep foods from burning and sticking. Some models made by Kuhn Rikon include a conventional lid to use when the pot isn't under pressure—a nice extra.

A good manual. While the new crop of pressure cookers have fewer parts and are fairly intuitive to use, a clearly written manual will help you learn the particulars. Just as important, it should list ballpark cooking times for nearly any food you might want to cook under pressure. Once you make your favorite chili in the

pressure cooker a few times, you'll be a pro, but until then, having some guidelines will eliminate a lot of guesswork.

Jan Newberry is the food and wine editor of San Francisco magazine. ♦

Risotto Under Pressure

"This speedy recipe is one of my favorites for the pressure cooker," says Abigail Johnson Dodge, *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen director. "In less than ten minutes I've got a great side dish for grilled chicken or pork. To make it into a main dish, I add leftover vegetables like mushrooms, broccoli, or peas, along with some chopped prosciutto." Serves three to four as a side dish; two as a main dish.

3 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 large shallot, minced
Pinch saffron (optional)
¾ cup arborio rice
2 cups chicken stock (or 1¾ cups stock plus ¼ cup white wine)
2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan cheese; more to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Heat 2 Tbs. of the butter in a 4-qt. or larger pressure cooker over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook, stirring often, until soft, 4 to 5 min. Add the saffron, if using, and cook 1 min. Add the rice and stir until the grains are well coated with the melted butter. Add the chicken stock (or wine and stock) and lock the lid in place. Increase the heat to high until the cooker reaches high pressure. Reduce the heat as necessary to maintain the high pressure setting and cook for 6 min.

Remove the pot from the heat and immediately release all the pressure (either using a quick-release feature or by running the pot under cold water, keeping the steam vent tilted away from you). Unlock and remove the lid and check the consistency of the rice and the amount of liquid. If need be, pop the pan (uncovered) back on medium-high heat and cook, stirring, until the rice is *al dente* and the risotto is silky and creamy, not soupy. Remove from the heat and stir in the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, the parsley, Parmesan, salt, and pepper. Serve immediately.

Tips for better pressure cooking

♦ Choose recipes that combine most of the ingredients at the start of cooking or else at the end. It's simply not practical to release the pressure, add more ingredients, and then bring the pot back up to pressure again.

♦ Depending on the type and amount of food, it can take from 30 seconds up to 20 minutes to reach full pressure. To speed things up, heat liquids before adding them to the pot. Interestingly, the amount of food in the pot has no bearing on the cooking time; ten potatoes cook as quickly as one.

♦ High pressure is fine for most foods, but use low pressure for tender food, such as chicken breasts, so they're less likely to overcook. Start timing the cooking from the moment pressure is reached.

♦ Once the pot reaches

full pressure, reduce the heat to maintain a constant pressure. For electric stoves, it's helpful to set one burner to high and a second one to a lower heat. Bring the cooker up to pressure on the high-heat burner and then move it to the second burner for the rest of cooking.

♦ The cooking time for most foods in a pressure cooker is one-quarter to one-third of the time it would take by conventional methods. When trying a new food or recipe, consult the manual for a recommended cooking time, or compare your recipe to a similar one.

♦ Since no liquid is lost when using a pressure cooker, it's a good idea to reduce the amount of liquid a conventional recipe calls for by about 20%.

♦ For foods that overcook easily, like rice, use the

quick-release feature or move the cooker to a sink, tilt the pot slightly, and let cold water wash down one side, away from the vents or regulator.

♦ When cooking beans, potatoes, or other foods with skins you want to keep intact, use the natural-release method (take the pot off the heat so the pressure drops gradually). Use it also for beef, which toughens when pressure is released too quickly, and for cheesecakes.

♦ In a pressure cooker, liquid doesn't evaporate as food cooks, and that trapped steam can dilute flavor. To correct this, release the pressure a bit early and let the dish simmer uncovered over low heat. You can also stir in fresh herbs or other seasonings at this point to boost flavor.



A shortbread-like sugar cookie gets decorated with elegant restraint. A narrow tip allows for pretty detail.

How to roll, cut, pipe, layer, drizzle, and dust for the prettiest cookies



A drizzle of chocolate gives these nutty, chewy Florentines some extra pizzazz.

Cookies

That Look As Great As They Taste



Get a stained-glass effect from sugar cookie cut-outs and jam. Dust the tops before assembling.



A pastry tube with a star tip gives a festive shape to Orange Cream Stars.



Thumbprint cookies with a sophisticated look and flavor: Hazelnut Linzer.

BY MELISSA MURPHY HAGENBART

One of my favorite things to do come holiday time is to bake for friends and family. This usually involves a couple of pies, a rich chocolate torte, a few sweet breads, and always dozens of Christmas cookies.

What makes Christmas cookies different from ordinary cookies? I think it's the extra care put into making them look beautiful. As good as chocolate chip and oatmeal cookies can be, around this time of year you want to make, give, and serve cookies that not only taste fabulous but also look fabulous.

There are many ways to make cookies look beautiful. The first thing that comes to mind is icing them with tinted royal icing. But I draw the line at making really heavily iced cookies—they make

lovely decorations but are awful to eat. (I also substitute lemon juice for the water in my royal icing to give it a better flavor.) Another flavorful way I add color to cookies is by using jams and jellies to give them a jewel-like look. I like raspberry jam for my Linzer cookies, but I use all kinds of colorful jams to give sandwiched sugar cookie cut-outs a stained-glass effect.

But pretty doesn't always mean color. My orange stars look elegant because I pipe the dough. To dress up Florentine cookies—a sugar cookie layer topped with caramel and nuts—I cut them carefully and precisely into diamond shapes and then drizzle them with chocolate. Gilding the lily? Maybe. But you have to admit they're gorgeous.

Throughout the recipes and in the photos and captions, I offer tips on making Christmas cookies look their best. Here are some other considerations:

♦ **If you're rolling cookies, be sure to roll them evenly.** A larger rolling pin helps keep the pressure



Melissa uses an offset spatula to evenly spread the caramel-nut mixture onto the cookie base. Because the mixture is very hot, keep your hands away—as tempting as it might be to take a taste.

even, giving you the same thickness throughout the dough.

- ◆ **Flour the counter generously when rolling cookies.** This will keep the dough from sticking and ripping. Flour the cookie cutters periodically, too, but be sure to dust off excess flour before baking.

- ◆ **Keep the dough cool to keep the cookies' shape.** Also, use a spatula to lift rolled cookies onto the baking sheet without distorting their shape.

- ◆ **Let cookies cool on the baking sheet.** Hot cookies can bend or warp.

- ◆ **Use a toothpick or a small paintbrush to add food coloring to small batches of royal icing.** A little color goes a long way.

- ◆ **When piping a design, practice on parchment** before moving to the cookies.

- ◆ **Top icing with sprinkles, candies, or dragées while the icing is still very wet** so as not to crack the finished surface.

- ◆ **Take your time.** Haste makes for messy results.

Finally, the right equipment goes a long way toward giving you beautiful results. I already mentioned a large rolling pin. A large offset spatula makes



Careful scoring keeps the cookie crust intact. First, use a large serrated knife to cut through just the cookie layer.



Next, use a large chef's knife and a good amount of pressure to cut through the nut topping. The cookies cut best at room temperature.

it easier to spread the filling for the Florentines, while a tiny offset spatula can come in handy when icing. It's convenient to have a lot of pastry bags as well as couplers, which let you change colors and tips easily. Heavy-duty baking sheets—I like double-thick aluminum pans—will bake the cookies evenly. Half-sheet pans are what I use at home, and what the Florentines require (for these, you'll also need a candy thermometer). Cookie cutters are always fun to collect and buy; look for sturdy ones on the larger size without too many narrow points, which tend to break off. For sources for all of these items, as well as the food coloring I use, see Sources, p. 80.

Chocolate Drizzled Florentines

For best results, you'll need a candy thermometer for this recipe. Chopped candied citrus peel is an excellent addition. To make candied citrus peel, simmer orange zest in a sugar syrup until tender and let cool. *Yields about sixty 1 1/4-inch diamond-shaped cookies.*

1 recipe Sugar Cookie dough (see p. 72)
1 3/4 cups sugar
2 Tbs. light corn syrup
3/4 cup water
7 oz. (14 Tbs.) unsalted butter
3/4 cup honey
1 cup heavy cream
2 tsp. freshly grated orange zest
17 oz. (4 cups) sliced blanched almonds, lightly toasted
3/4 cup chopped candied citrus peel (optional)
6 oz. semisweet chocolate, melted and kept warm

Lightly grease a half sheet pan (a sided pan that measures 11 1/2 x 16 1/2 inches). Line the pan with parchment.

Roll the chilled sugar cookie dough between two pieces of parchment into a rectangle until it's between 1/8 and 1/4 inch thick. Remove the top piece of parchment and flip the dough into the prepared half sheet pan so that it fits along the bottom and up the sides completely. If the dough cracks a bit, just press it back together. Press it into the sides of the pan; don't leave any gaps. Cut off any excess dough by running a rolling pin along the edges of the pan. Chill until firm.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line the dough with foil or parchment and weight it with dried beans or pie weights. Bake until the edges are golden, about 20 min. Remove the weights and the foil or parchment and continue to bake until completely set, about another 10 min. Let cool before filling.

In a large heavy-based saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup, and water and bring to a boil. Cook until the mixture becomes amber in color (approximately 350° to 360°F on a candy thermometer). Immediately remove from the heat. Carefully add the butter and honey, return to the heat, and stir until dissolved. Bring the mixture back to a boil and carefully add the heavy cream and zest (the mixture will bubble up and may splatter). Boil the mixture until it reaches 250°F on a candy thermometer. Remove from the heat and stir in the almonds (and candied citrus peel, if using). Quickly pour the mixture into the baked sugar cookie shell before it cools. Spread the nut mixture evenly with a lightly greased spatula.

Bake until the topping begins to bubble, 18 to 20 min. Let cool completely in the pan. Cut along the edge of the pan to loosen the edges. Turn the Florentines out, upside down, onto a clean cutting surface. Line two clean baking sheets with parchment.

To cut through these thick, chewy cookies without cracking the crust, slice them in two stages. First, score the ragged edges of the cookie crust with a bread knife, cutting through the crust completely (see the photo above left). With a large chef's knife, cut through the filling to cut off the ragged edges completely. Next, score 1 1/4-inch-wide horizontal bands top to bottom (again deeply, through the crust but not through the filling). To make the diamonds, score

1 1/4-inch strips starting at the top left corner and dividing that corner into two 45° angles. Continue scoring at this width and this angle until all the cookies are scored. Follow the scoring lines with the chef's knife, using steady force to cut through the thick nut filling.

Turn each Florentine over and set on the clean sheet pans. Fill a pastry bag with a tiny tip, a heavy plastic bag with a corner cut off, or a paper cone with the melted chocolate (or use a fork dipped in the chocolate) and drizzle it on the diamonds. The cookies are best at room temperature but can be refrigerated if the kitchen is too warm for the chocolate to set.

Orange Cream Stars

The cookies can be made ahead and frozen. The orange cream may be refrigerated for several days; soften it at room temperature before using it. *Yields 72 cookies to make 36 sandwiches.*

FOR THE COOKIES:

3 oz. cream cheese, softened
8 oz. (16 Tbs. or 2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 Tbs. freshly grated orange zest
1 large egg yolk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
12 oz. (2 2/3 cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE ORANGE CREAM FILLING:

4 oz. (8 Tbs. or 1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar; more for dusting
1 Tbs. freshly grated orange zest
2 tsp. orange juice (Continued)

Shaping and filling with a bag



Cookies look especially pretty when piped. Keep the pastry bag straight up and down and give the bag a twist as you finish. Put your free hand down on the parchment to keep it from lifting right along with the pastry bag.



You can spoon on the filling, but piping is more efficient. Line up each cookie with its closest match for the best-looking sandwiches.

Decorating with a piping bag



Having several colors at the ready makes piping easier. When the icings aren't in use, stand them upright in a container lined with a crumpled wet paper towel so that the tips don't dry out and get clogged.



"Flooding" fills a large area quickly. Before flooding, outline the area with royal icing at piping consistency. Let dry and then fill with thinner royal icing. Use a small offset spatula to smooth it, if necessary.



Keep a steady hand and take your time when piping. Before starting a new color, check the bag for air bubbles by squeezing a small amount in a bowl.



For melted chocolate, a paper cone works just as well as a pastry bag. (Fork tines dipped in chocolate also drizzle well.) The author likes to bring the tip far to the right and left of the cookie so the chocolate drizzles onto the side of the cookie as well.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line several baking sheets with parchment. Dab a few drops of water between the pan and the paper to help keep the paper on the baking sheet as you pipe the cookies.

To make the cookies—In a large bowl, beat together the cream cheese, butter, sugar, orange zest, egg yolk, and vanilla with an electric mixer until fluffy, about 4 min. Gradually mix in the flour.

Fill a large pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch star tip about two-thirds of the way full. Twist the opening closed and squeeze out generous 1½-inch stars, spacing them about 1½ inches apart on the prepared sheets. To get the best shapes, hold the bag straight up and down with the edge of the tip just barely touching the baking sheet. Squeeze the bag firmly until the shape is as wide as you like. Stop squeezing and push the tip down slightly. Give the tip a slight twist as you pull it up and away.

Bake the cookies until the edges just begin to brown, about 20 min. Set the baking sheet on a rack until the cookies are cool enough to remove with a spatula without distorting their shape.

To assemble the cookies—Beat the filling ingredients together until smooth, about 5 min. Line half of the cookies upside down on a piece of parchment. Fit a pastry bag with a ½-inch plain tip and fill it with the orange cream. Pipe approximately ½ tsp. filling onto each cookie base. Place another cookie, right side up, sandwich style, on top. Press down lightly to adhere. Refrigerate until set. Dust the cookies lightly with confectioners' sugar before serving.

Sugar Cookies

This dough is not only great for cut-out cookies, it also acts as the delicious bottom layer of the Florentines. *Yields 2 lb. 10 oz. dough, for about 42 three-inch cookies.*

14 oz. (28 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened
1½ tsp. finely chopped lemon zest
¾ cup sugar
½ tsp. salt
1 large egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 lb. 5 oz. (4⅔ cups) all-purpose flour

In the bowl of an electric mixer, combine the softened butter, zest, sugar, and salt and beat with the paddle until light and fluffy. Add the egg and beat it in well. In three additions, stir in the flour until blended. Spread the dough out, about an inch thick, on a sheet pan, cover with plastic wrap, and chill until firm. You can refrigerate the dough, wrapped well, for up to a week.

When ready to roll, heat the oven to 350°F and line baking sheets with parchment. Allow the dough to soften slightly. You may find it easier to work with half of the dough, keeping the other half chilled; dough that's too warm won't hold its shape well.

Generously flour your work surface. Roll the dough ¼ inch thick. Dust off excess flour with a clean, dry pastry brush. Cut out the shapes you want, rerolling the scraps to make more cookies. Arrange the cookies 1 inch apart on the lined baking sheets. Bake until the edges turn golden, 15 to 20 min. Allow to cool on the baking sheet before transferring or decorating.



Hazelnut Linzer Thumbprints

Yields about 4 dozen cookies.

5 oz. (about 1 cup) hazelnuts, toasted and cooled
10 oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose flour
½ cup sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. salt
8 oz. (16 Tbs. or 2 sticks) unsalted butter,
cut into ½-inch cubes and chilled
2 large eggs, separated
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 Tbs. lemon zest
1 cup raspberry preserves
3½ oz. (about ¾ cup) hazelnuts, toasted and hand
chopped medium-fine, for rolling
Confectioners' sugar for dusting

In a food processor, process the 5 oz. hazelnuts with ½ cup of the flour until fine-textured but not powdered. Add the remaining flour, sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. Pulse to combine. With your fingers, toss the butter in the flour to coat it, being careful to avoid the processor's blade. Pulse until the mixture looks like cornmeal. Add the 2 egg yolks (reserve the whites), the vanilla, and the zest and pulse until the dough just begins to hold together. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment.

Lightly beat the reserved egg whites. Shape the dough into 1-inch balls. Roll each ball in the beaten egg whites and then in the chopped 3½ oz. hazelnuts (you may work with lightly floured hands if necessary). Arrange the balls 1½ inches apart on the lined baking sheets. Flatten them slightly with your palm.

Press your thumb (floured if necessary) into the center of each cookie to create an indentation. If the dough splits apart, gently press it back together. Fill each cookie with about ½ tsp. of the preserves.

Bake the cookies until lightly browned, about 20 min. Let them cool on the baking sheets on a rack. When cool, lightly sift the confectioners' sugar over the cookies. Dip your finger in water and tap the center of each cookie so that the jam shines through the sugar.

Royal Icing

For more tips on icing, see the photos at far left.

Yields 1½ cups.

2 large egg whites
½ tsp. cream of tartar
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice or water; more as needed
1 lb. confectioners' sugar; more as needed

Combine all the ingredients in the bowl of an electric mixer on low speed until uniform, smooth, and stiff; you'll see it change from a grayish color to opaque white. Add more lemon juice or water a little at a time as needed to thin it. (Remember that liquid coloring will thin it further.) To test for the right texture for piping, a drizzled ribbon should disappear in 15 seconds; for flooding, the texture should be of newly melted chocolate. When adding food coloring, start with a drop or two and mix thoroughly after each addition. Store for up to two weeks, covered airtight in the refrigerator. Let soften and stir with a spoon before using.

"When I make an assortment of cookies, I consider each one a little gift itself," says Melissa.

Melissa Murphy Hagenbart is the chef-owner of Sweet Melissa Pâtisserie in Brooklyn, New York. ♦

Sorting out chocolate



Whether you're baking the ultimate chocolate cake or making a chocolate sauce this holiday season, chances are you'll have to make a decision about what kind of chocolate to use. But sorting out types of chocolate at the grocery store or gourmet shop can be confusing. Some are labeled "bittersweet" or "semisweet," and some are simply identified by cocoa percentages. To understand chocolate labels, you need to know a few basic facts about how chocolate is made.

All real chocolate comes from the cocoa bean, the fruit of a tropical tree, *Theobroma cacao*. Much of the quality of the chocolate will depend on the origin and quality of the beans.

To make chocolate, processors roast and shell the cocoa beans, leaving only the centers, called nibs. These nibs are then pulverized or ground into a smooth liquid that's called chocolate liquor (although it contains no alcohol). When the chocolate

liquor cools, it forms solid blocks.

Chocolate liquor is the basis for all things chocolate. Pure chocolate liquor is very dark and bitter and has only two components—cocoa solids and cocoa butter. The solids give chocolate its characteristic dark, strong flavor, and the cocoa butter translates to a smooth mouth feel.

In its natural state, chocolate liquor contains a little more than half (50% to 58%) cocoa butter and the rest solids. Early on, producers learned that by increasing the cocoa butter, they could create chocolate with a better sheen and smoother texture. So they developed a high-pressure filter process that breaks down chocolate liquor and separates the solids from the butter. They could then manipulate the chocolate to produce a range of styles.

To create eating chocolate, sugar and flavorings are added to the cocoa butter

and solids. While some sugar is needed to make pure chocolate palatable, the best examples contain a high percentage of real chocolate and only small amounts of sugar or other additives.

This last detail is perhaps the most confusing when it comes to deciphering chocolate labels. When manufacturers list the percentage of chocolate on a label (a practice common in Europe and gaining popularity here), they often use the terms "X% of cocoa solids" or "X% of cocoa." What they're actually referring to is the total percentage by weight of cocoa solids and cocoa butter combined, in other words, the total percentage of ingredients derived purely from the cocoa bean. The remaining weight of the chocolate will consist of sugar, lecithin (a soy-derived emulsifier), and typically vanilla. Lesser quality chocolates also include other fats (like palm kernel oil) and flavorings.

What these percentages don't tell you, however, is the



A percentage label refers to the total amount of ingredients derived solely from the cocoa bean (cocoa solids and cocoa butter).



Words like semisweet, bittersweet, and unsweetened indicate the minimum amounts (by law) of cocoa butter and solids.

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A chocolate lexicon

To make sense of the most common labels on chocolate, here is a brief lexicon. The minimum standards cited are those established by the FDA.

♦ **Unsweetened chocolate** is the closest we can get in the marketplace to buying pure chocolate liquor since it contains nothing more than cocoa solids and cocoa butter. It can also be called chocolate, bitter chocolate, baking chocolate, and cooking chocolate.

♦ **Sweet chocolate** is the most confusing category since it includes all dark chocolates that have any amount of sugar added. By law, sweet chocolate must contain a minimum of 35% chocolate liquor, but most good-quality supermarket and restaurant choc-

olates have closer to 55%. On the top end, some dark chocolates have as much as 70% or more.

♦ **Semisweet chocolate** and **bittersweet chocolate** are both subcategories of sweet chocolate. While both must also contain a minimum of 35% chocolate liquor, semisweet chocolate will contain less sugar than sweet chocolate, and bittersweet even less.

♦ **Couverture** means *covering* in French; it's a term used by professionals for a chocolate made with an exceptionally high percentage of cocoa butter. The high fat content means that the chocolate will melt very smoothly to create thin coatings that harden well.

♦ **Milk chocolate** must contain a minimum of 10% real

chocolate liquor (although some contain as much as 40%) and 12% whole milk.

♦ **White chocolate** isn't really chocolate since it contains no cocoa solids but only cocoa butter. Currently the FDA has no standards of labeling for white chocolate, but these are being developed. In general, the best white chocolate will have a higher percentage of cocoa butter and lesser amounts of other fats.

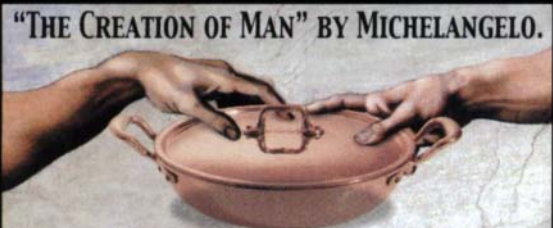
♦ **German chocolate** is a brand name for a sweet dark chocolate (sweeter than semisweet) that was developed by Samuel German, an employee of the Bakers chocolate company. The eponymous cake was created in Dallas in the 1950s.

proportion of cocoa butter to cocoa solids. About the only way to figure out whether one chocolate has more cocoa butter than another is to compare the nutritional labels. As long as you're comparing first-quality dark chocolates without any additives, the one with a higher fat content will be the one with more cocoa butter. This will most likely be the more expensive of the two as well, since cocoa butter is more valuable than the solids for its texture and richness. Also, check the ingredient list while you're at it, because if the chocolate contains any dairy products or other types of fat, this will skew the fat percentage.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

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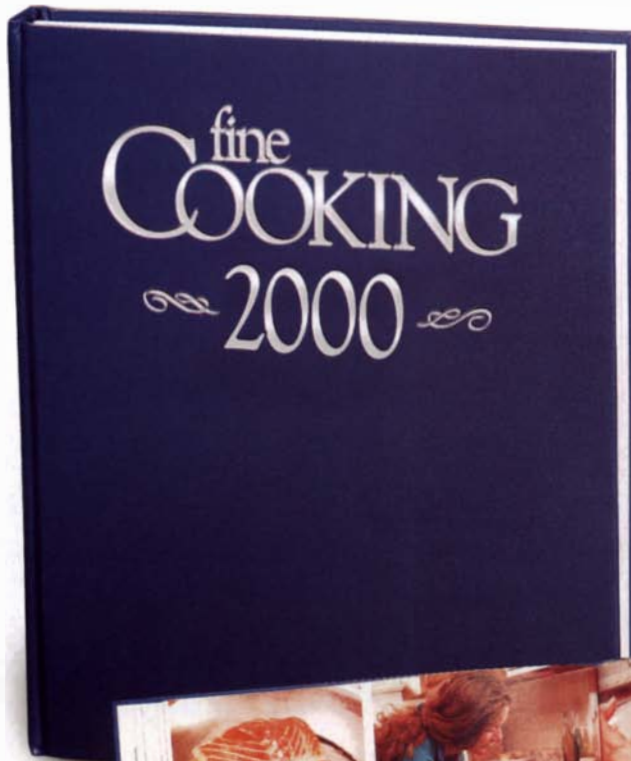
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For great cakes, get the ratios right

Have you ever wondered how a baker can create a cake recipe from scratch and know that it will work? Unlike a savory chef, who can often use intuition to design a successful dish, a baker must work within defined parameters to produce a cake that will rise, set, and taste the way she wants. Experienced cake bakers would never dream of trying to bake a cake without first

or so tender that it falls apart.

Bakers have formulas that balance these ingredients so their cakes have the strength to hold together but are still tender and moist. These formulas don't have to be followed dead on, but if you stray by more than about 20 percent, you may have problems.

There are two sets of formulas: pound-cake (or lean-cake) formulas, which have

♦ **The sugar should weigh the same as, or slightly more than, the flour.** Remember that this is weight, *not* volume. A cup of sugar weighs about 7 ounces, and a cup of all-purpose flour weighs about 4½ ounces. So, if we're building a recipe with 1 cup sugar, we'll need about 1½ cups flour (about 6¾ ounces).

♦ **The eggs should weigh about the same as, or slightly more than, the fat.** One large egg (out of its shell) weighs about 1¾ ounces. If our developing recipe contains 4 ounces butter (or shortening), we could use two whole eggs (3½ ounces). This is a little

eggs. To get the total amount of liquid to weigh more than the sugar, we could add 4 ounces (½ cup) of a liquid, like milk or buttermilk.

Proper leavening is also critical. If a recipe is over-leavened, the bubbles will get too big, float to the top, and... pop! There goes your leavening, and here comes a heavy, dense cake. One teaspoon of baking powder for one cup of flour is the perfect amount of leavening for most cake recipes. For baking soda (which is used if the recipe has a considerable amount of acidic ingredients; see Food Science in *Fine Cooking* #6),

sugar = flour

“doing the math” to make sure that the ingredients are in balance. Having the right proportions of flour, eggs, sugar, and fat makes all the difference.

eggs = butter

Flour and eggs for structure, fat and sugar for tenderness

In cakes, the protein ingredients, which are the flour and eggs, are the major structure-builders. They're essentially what holds the cake together. Fat and sugar do the opposite; they actually wreck or soften the cake's structure, providing tenderness and moisture.

If you have too much of the structure-building flour and eggs, the cake will be tough and dry. If you have too much of the moistening, softening fats and sugars, the cake might not set. It could be a soupy mess

less sugar than flour; and “high-ratio” formulas, which contain more sugar. The general rule is that high-ratio cakes require shortening, whose added emulsifiers help hold the cake together. You can, however, make successful high-ratio cakes with butter if you aerate the butter by creaming it and if you add emulsifiers in the form of egg yolks. Some bakers even make cakes with olive oil, which contains natural emulsifiers (mono- and diglycerides).

Here are the three formulas for the more popular, sweeter, high-ratio cakes:

under, but remember that these rules are flexible, and we're still within 20%.

But eggs have two parts: whites, which dry out baked goods, and yolks, which make textures smooth and velvety. A yolk from a large egg weighs about ⅔ ounce. One way to balance the eggs with the fat and to get a smoother cake is to add extra yolks. You could use one egg plus three yolks for a total of about 3¾ ounces.

♦ **The liquid (including the eggs) should weigh the same as, or more than, the sugar.** Our recipe now has 7 ounces sugar and 3½ or 3¾ ounces

use ¼ teaspoon soda for each cup of flour.

Finally, don't forget a little salt, about ½ teaspoon for a small cake like this. It's a major flavor enhancer.

Once you have a working recipe, you can test it and start making adjustments to taste. I like baked goods very moist, so I would have started with one egg and three yolks. If I decided I wanted a moister cake, I could bump up the sugar, or I could replace some or all of the butter with oil. Oil coats flour proteins better than other fats and will make a more tender, moister product.

eggs + liquid = sugar

Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, wrote the award-winning *CookWise* (Morrow). ♦



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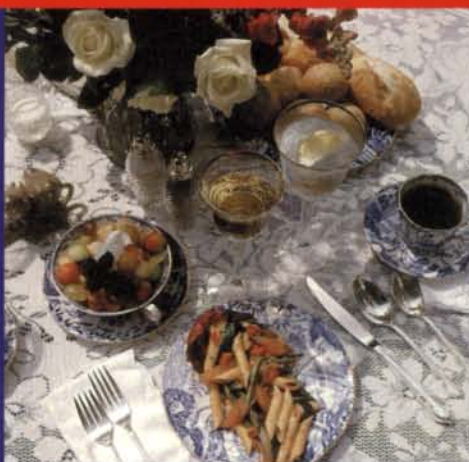
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Hot Sour Salty Sweet, by Jeffrey Alford & Naomi Duguid; hardcover, 368 pp.; Artisan, \$40.

The New Book of Middle Eastern Food, by Claudia Roden; hardcover, 544 pp.; Knopf, \$35.

Sephardic Flavors: Jewish Cooking of the Mediterranean, by Joyce Goldstein; hardcover, 208 pp.; Chronicle, \$35.

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The Essential Cuisines of Mexico, by Diana Kennedy; hardcover, 504 pp.; Clarkson Potter, \$35.

Mexico, One Plate at a Time, by Rick Bayless; hardcover, 320 pp.; Scribner, \$35.

Artisan Baking Across America, by Maggie Glezer; hardcover, 256 pp.; Artisan, \$40.

Sweet Miniatures, by Flo Braker; softcover, 384 pp.; Chronicle, \$22.95.

Death by Chocolate Cakes, by Marcel Desaulniers; hardcover, 224 pp.; William Morrow, \$35.

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1. Publication title: *Fine Cooking*. 2. Publication no. 1072-5121.
3. Filing date: September 1, 2000. 4. Issue frequency: Bimonthly.
5. No. of issues published annually: 6. 6. Annual subscription price: \$29.95. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, Fairfield County, CT 06470-5506. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. 9. Publisher: Sarah Roman, 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Editor: Martha Holmberg, 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Managing Editor: Susie Middleton, 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. 10. Owner: The Taunton Press, Inc., 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Stockholders owning or holding 1% or more of total amount of stock: Taunton, Inc., 63 S. Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders: None. 12. Not applicable. 13. Publication title: *Fine Cooking*. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: August/September 2000. 15. Extent and nature of circulation:

	Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Actual number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date
A. Total no. copies (net press run)	330,091	341,169
B. Paid and/or requested circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales	85,647	84,300
2. Mail subscriptions	108,128	114,972
C. Total paid and/or requested circulation	193,775	199,272
D. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, other free copies)	7,452	8,615
E. Free distribution outside the mail	1,585	1,618
F. Total free distribution	9,038	10,233
G. Total distribution	202,813	209,505
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1. Office use, leftovers, spoiled	7,489	6,785
2. Return from news agents	119,788	124,879
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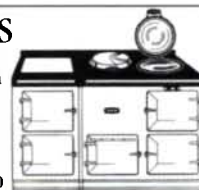
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		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Individual Beef Wellingtons	40	1070	730	48	35	82	27	42	7	285	1080	4	per serving
Smoked Trout Rillettes	44	80	45	8	0	5	2.5	1.5	0.5	50	570	0	based on 8 servings
Chicken Liver Pâté w/Pancetta	44	150	100	7	3	12	6	4	1	155	250	0	based on 8 servings
Fresh Tuna Pâté Scented w/Rosemary	45	190	170	6	0	19	11	6	1	60	85	0	based on 8 servings
Creamy Parmesan Swiss Chard Gratin	48	310	250	7	11	28	15	9	2	75	600	1	based on 6 servings
Escarole & White Bean Soup	49	390	220	14	30	25	5	16	2	15	1080	9	per serving
Garlicky Braised Kale	49	200	140	5	15	15	2	11	2	0	650	3	per serving
Spicy Mustard Greens w/Asian Noodles	50	380	180	17	28	20	3	6	9	25	1240	4	per serving
Wilted Tender Greens w/Orange	50	160	110	3	11	13	5	7	1	15	740	5	per serving
Classic Roasted Potatoes	52	180	60	3	27	7	1	5	1	0	330	2	based on 6 servings
Mustard & Rosemary Roasted Potatoes	53	220	100	4	30	11	1	7	1	0	730	3	based on 6 servings
Roasted Potatoes & Turnips	53	150	70	3	19	8	5	2	0	20	380	3	based on 6 servings
Doughnut Muffins	55	430	190	5	57	21	13	6	1	90	270	1	per muffin
Linguine w/Leeks, Prosciutto & Lemon	58	630	280	21	68	32	13	9	7	85	830	5	based on 6 servings
Gemelli w/Cauliflower, Scallions & Olives	58	760	260	25	101	29	4	19	3	10	1470	9	based on 2 servings
Fettuccine w/Shrimp & Garlic	59	900	290	42	108	32	4	21	4	170	1050	10	based on 2 servings
Penne w/Sausage, Chard & Pine Nuts	59	840	300	42	95	33	5	10	5	45	1180	7	based on 2 servings
Pasta Shells w/Chicken & Mushrooms	60	880	360	48	79	39	15	17	4	190	990	5	based on 2 servings
Provençal Salt Cod & Potato Purée	62	300	210	12	12	23	3	16	2	25	520	1	based on 8 servings
Salt Cod Fritters	63	280	150	13	20	17	2	11	4	95	490	1	per fritter
Risotto Under Pressure	67	240	90	5	31	10	6	3	0	25	230	1	based on 4 servings
Chocolate Drizzled Florentines	71	230	130	3	23	15	7	6	1	30	25	1	per cookie
Orange Cream Stars	71	140	80	1	15	9	5	3	0	30	10	0	per cookie sandwich
Sugar Cookies	72	140	70	2	14	8	5	2	0	25	30	0	per cookie
Hazelnut Linzer Thumbprints	73	120	70	2	12	7	3	4	0	20	25	1	per cookie
Royal Icing	73	25	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	per teaspoon
Chicken Marsala w/Pancetta & Cream	90	420	140	36	25	16	5	8	1	100	720	1	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Give Chicken Cutlets Deep Flavor in a Flash

Chicken Marsala—a classic chicken cutlet preparation—is a main dish that's ready literally in minutes. And while I've always liked chicken Marsala well enough—the cutlets get coated lightly with flour, sautéed, and the pan is deglazed with Marsala wine to make a sauce—it sometimes feels a little too one-dimensional. To jazz up this classic dish, I've added pancetta and a little cream. Both are quick additions, but they result in a richer, more deeply flavored dish.

You can buy packaged skinless, boneless chicken breasts that are already sliced very thin. If you don't see any in the butcher's case, ask the butcher to slice the chicken breasts for you; I often ask at supermarkets, and it's never been a problem. (Of course, you can slice the chicken breasts yourself, but it will take you a few minutes.)

Pancetta is Italian bacon that, unlike American bacon, is not smoked. You used to have to go to an Italian deli or a specialty food store to find pancetta, but now it's available in most supermarket delis. If you don't see it, ask for it. I like to buy a thick slice and dice it myself, but sometimes you'll find already packaged pancetta sliced very thin. That will work fine, too, and it will cook even faster.

After frying the pancetta, reserve the fat to cook the chicken breasts in—another flavor boost. And don't forget to season the chicken before you flour it. Because the pancetta adds its own salty flavor, go light on the salt, but use ample freshly ground black pepper.

For the quickest dinner, serve the chicken with sautéed spinach and crusty bread. It's also great with mashed potatoes and green beans blanched and then sautéed until browned in spots.

Chicken Marsala with Pancetta & Cream

You can buy thin cutlets or ask your supermarket butcher to cut some for you. This recipe is easily doubled, but you'll likely need to cook the chicken in batches. Serves two.

Olive oil

2 oz. pancetta (about a ¼-inch thick slice), cut into a ¼-inch dice

Flour for dredging (about ½ cup)

4 thin chicken breast cutlets, about ½ lb. total

Coarse salt

Freshly ground black pepper, preferably on the coarse side

½ cup dry Marsala wine

2 to 4 Tbs. heavy cream

Minced fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

Coat a large skillet lightly with olive oil and set it over medium-high heat. Add the pancetta and cook until just crisp and lightly browned. Remove with a slotted spoon—leave the fat in the pan—and set aside.

Put the flour on a plate. Pat the cutlets dry. Season them on both sides lightly with salt and amply with pepper. Heat the skillet with the pancetta fat over medium high. Add more olive oil, if needed, to get about 2 Tbs. fat in the pan.

When the fat is hot, dredge a cutlet through the flour on both sides. Shake off the excess flour and immediately put the cutlet in the pan. Do the same with as many cutlets as will fit in the pan without touching. Sauté the cutlets, turning once, until browned on both sides; if thin, they should cook through in just a few minutes total. Transfer the cooked cutlets to a plate and continue sautéing the rest, adding more oil if necessary. Transfer these to the plate as well.

Pour off the excess fat. With the pan over medium-high heat, add the Marsala and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Cook until the Marsala is reduced by about a quarter. Stir in the cream and boil until you get a nicely thickened sauce. Return the chicken and pancetta to the pan and turn the cutlets over to coat. Let them reheat for 30 seconds to 1 min. Serve with the sauce and a sprinkling of parsley, if you like.

Joanne Smart is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



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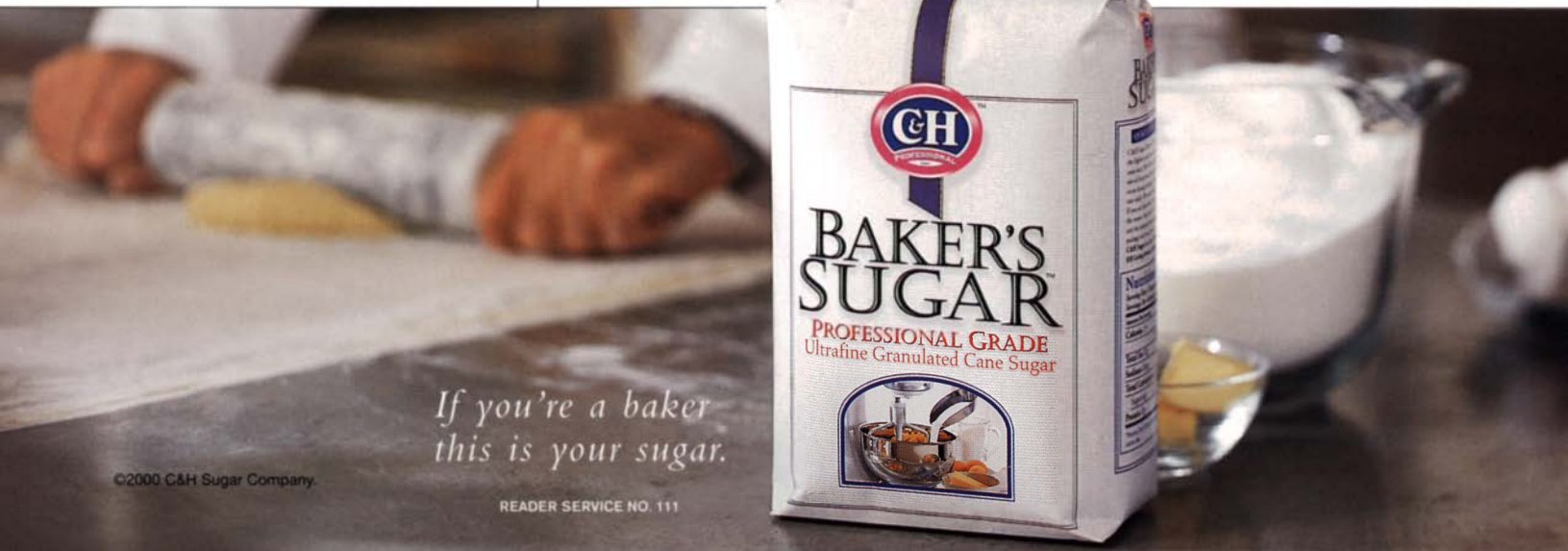


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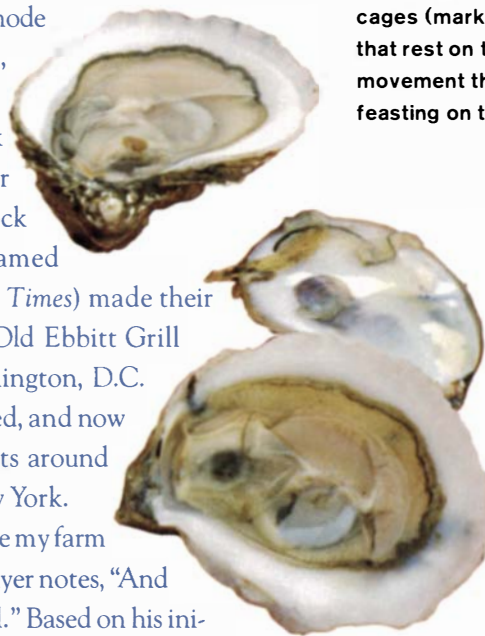
Block Island oysters start life as “seeds” the size of a thumbnail; they grow to about 1½ inches in their first year and to about 2 inches in their second—if one of their enemies (from tiny crabs to starfish) doesn't get them first.

Block Island's First Oyster Farm

Six years ago, former longline fisherman and lobsterman Todd Corayer was ready to make a change from the offshore life. He went to the nature conservancy on Block Island (a small island off the coasts of Rhode Island and Connecticut) and asked, “What can I do?”

Five years later, after much hard work and many permits, Corayer was an oyster farmer. His first batch of fresh, salty, Block Island raised Eastern oysters (nicknamed Block Island Beauties by the *New York Times*) made their debut to much acclaim at the 1999 Old Ebbitt Grill Oyster Riot, an annual event in Washington, D.C. That was the jump-start Corayer needed, and now his oysters are served in fine restaurants around the country, from San Francisco to New York.

“The water in Great Salt Pond (where my farm is) is the cleanest in Rhode Island,” Corayer notes, “And my oysters have a very high salinity level.” Based on his initial success, Corayer has expanded Block Island Shellfish Farm. He now has 400,000 oysters and clams growing with the assistance of his latest addition—a solar-powered water pump (the only one like it in the U.S.) that speeds water flow over the oyster beds. This should shorten the time an oyster grows to market size (3 inches) from three years to two.



The oysters need food, shelter, and protection, just like any other farm animal. Mesh bags protect the oysters from most hungry predators; as they grow, Corayer transfers them to larger-meshed bags. The bags tuck into large cages (marked by buoys to alert sailors and kayakers) that rest on the sandy bottom the oysters love. The tidal movement through the four-acre farm keeps the oysters feasting on the plankton-rich tides of the Atlantic.



To look their best, Block Island oysters get a scrub two or three times during their growth. When they're ready for market, they look much spiffier than a wild oyster.

Photos: Susan Middleton